

2008

Now is the Time To Act: Youth Gang Prevention in Ottawa

Final Report to Crime Prevention Ottawa

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Executive Summary

This report, authored by Astwood Strategy Corporation, was commissioned by Crime Prevention Ottawa in collaboration with a multi-stakeholder working group on gangs. The research protocol was designed to briefly summarize the youth gang situation in Ottawa, discuss what key informant interviewees highlighted is needed to address the current situation, as well as note the gaps in service delivery in the region.

A dual process of an on-line Likert scale survey instrument, in addition to key informant interviews with thirty-three diverse stakeholders across the region, was utilized to render the findings and recommendations outlined herein. With respect to the on-line survey, respondents (n=25), among other things, expressed strong agreement with respect to the notions that Ottawa requires a broader prevention response, a broader intervention/diversion response to address youth gangs, additional education on the youth gang issue, and that the youth gang issue was driven largely by issues such as neighbourhood (location), the illicit drug trade, socioeconomics and family conditions. Likewise, there was strong agreement that from a preventative standpoint, programs such as life skills development, mentoring programs and after schools programs would be most beneficial to Ottawa youth. In contrast, areas of less agreement included that there were sufficient prevention resources in place in Ottawa to deal with youth gangs, that there was sufficient inter-agency collaboration on the issue, and that there was sufficient awareness (amongst the general community, educators, parents and others) to deal constructively with the youth gang issue.

Key informant interviews rendered a great deal of information for consideration. A series of eight questions were posed, with detailed findings found herein. Among others, notable findings include that:

- there is a lack of broad based consensus in Ottawa as to the scope and dimension of the youth gang issue;
- that the preponderance of youth gangs and their activities is centred in key at risk communities distributed throughout the region inside the Greenbelt;
- that the principal reasons for youth gang affiliation were protection, belonging, accessing lucrative drug markets, lack of school engagement and inadequate parental supervision;
- that life skills development, organized after schools programs, mentorship programs, and primary prevention programs would be most effective in preventing youth gang involvement;
- that the biggest gaps in service delivery insofar as gang prevention were concerned were, among other things, broad based awareness programs, the capacity of the Ottawa Police SRO program, youth outreach programs and quality community house programs.

Asked what were the key factors for success underlying a youth gang prevention approach in Ottawa, respondents highlighted the need for a dedicated champion (to lead the effort), a common frame of reference in respect to the gang issue, proper resourcing (money to finance prevention efforts), a firm

commitment from the City of Ottawa, and multi-stakeholder involvement. Key prevention challenges cited going forward included lack of money, lack of awareness and lack of evidence base in respect to what works in youth gang prevention.

A small selection of interviews with existing and reformed gang members was included in this process, and common themes expressed for why youth joined in the first place included need for protection, access to lucrative drug markets, sibling involvement, sense of family and belonging, and camaraderie. When youth were asked what might have prevented their gang involvement in the first place, regrettably some indicated that little would have helped (because of level of community danger, family involvement, poverty, etc.), although some indicated the presence of pro-social, caring mentors, and more programs and activities in their communities may have helped keep them from gang involvement.

This report concludes with a brief discussion and a number of recommendations for action. The work of the CPO, and its multi-stakeholder group of associates, is to be congratulated for the fine work that has been done to date on this matter. There is consensus that the City of Ottawa is moving in the right direction on the issue of youth gang prevention, but yet more needs to be done. The spirit of cooperation is high, and CPO is increasingly being seen as the logical body to carry this agenda forward. The recommendations made reflect a spirit of continual improvement, and are focused on broadening the representation of the working group, striking a separate crime prevention strategy sub-committee and facilitating a process to craft an initial crime prevention plan, creating an inventory of programs in communities with more acute youth gang issues, creating an inventory of emerging best practices in youth gang prevention, and perhaps even facilitating a one-day session on gang prevention, bringing together people from across the region and beyond who have successfully made a difference in reducing the incidence of youth gang activity. Taken together, the continued leadership of Crime Prevention Ottawa and their partners, and additional investments in moving a youth gang prevention agenda forward over the coming months, will help Ottawa maintain its position as one of the safest big cities in Canada, complete with one of the lowest per capita concentration of youth gang members in the country.

Preamble

On February 23, 2007 the provincial Ministry of Children and Youth Services, the Youth Services Bureau and the Ottawa Police Service presented a "Youth and Gangs" training session for service providers at Ben Franklin Place. The event brought together over 200 interested participants and ended with a call for the community to work together to address the gang issue in Ottawa. In May 2007, the Youth Services Bureau and Crime Prevention Ottawa co-chaired a broad, multi-stakeholder collaboration, the first working group on youth gangs.

On October 10, 2007, Crime Prevention Ottawa, in collaboration with the multi-stakeholder working group on gangs, issued a request for proposal entitled *Ottawa Youth Gang Report*, the purpose of which was to briefly summarize the youth gang situation in Ottawa, discuss what key informant interviewees highlighted is needed to address the current situation as well as note the gaps in service delivery in the region. The overall goal of this project was therefore to gather a diversity of opinion in respect to the youth gang situation to assist in developing a youth gang prevention strategy for the City of Ottawa.

Astwood Strategy Corporation was selected for this assignment and is pleased to submit our report of findings. Enclosed herein is a summary of methodology, along with a summary of findings from three distinct areas of information gathering. The report concludes with a series of recommendations for consideration by Crime Prevention Ottawa, distilled both from the key informant interviews and Astwood's experience with youth gang issues.

Methodology

To achieve the purpose set out by Crime Prevention Ottawa (CPO), Astwood employed a three-pronged research approach, as follows:

1. Creation and implementation of on-line Likert-scale survey instrument. This instrument consisted of 41 statements, in which we asked respondents to express their degree of acceptance of each. Thirty-nine individuals were sent e-mail invitations to participate, with the base respondent list being provided to Astwood by CPO, with additions to the list being made by Astwood. In total, twenty-five individuals completed the survey, for a response rate of 64%. The survey was implemented prior to the key informant interviews (see #2 below), in order to gather some general themes and perceptions for further examination during the interview process. The instrument and introductory letter can be found in Appendix A.
2. Design and implementation of a key informant interview process. A standard interview template was created, and a list of prospective key informants was supplied to Astwood by CPO, with Astwood making additions to the list based on previous relationships and referrals from participating key informants. A total of 33 interviews were completed via telephone (and one via email correspondence), representing a broad cross section of the community including police service members, educators, social service agency personnel, community and youth workers and other criminal justice system stakeholders. A list of key informants who participated can be found in Appendix B.
3. Interviews with a small selection of existing and former youth gang members (4 and 1 respectively), conducted via the telephone on a confidential basis. While our goal was to speak to 8 to 10 individuals, it was difficult to secure the participation of others at this time.

Results From On-Line Survey

As noted in the methodology, we employed a 41-question Likert-scale survey instrument to gather opinion across a number of dimensions. For the purposes of this survey, we offered the following definition of “youth gang”: a self-formed group of 3 or more youth, with a common identity, who are under the age of 19 and involved in anti-social and/or criminal activities.”

In order to provide a numerical analysis of results, each element on the scale was assigned a numerical ranking (in parenthesis), as found below:

- Strongly Agree (5)
- Agree (4)
- Undecided (3)
- Disagree (2)
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Don't Know (n/a)

The numerical score for each question, as reported below, can be thought of as the overall strength of conviction of the respondents to the statement at hand. For example, a score of 4.75 would indicate that the respondents had a strong level of agreement with respect to the statement at hand. Some readers may find this format of reporting to be more intuitive than reporting, for instance, that “14.3% of respondents strongly agreed to the statement that the youth gang issue in Ottawa is largely driven by lack of family connection.”

3.1 Core Questions

The core questions posed to participants, and the results for each question ranked in order of strength of conviction from highest to lowest, are as follows:

Statement	Score
To respond to youth gangs, we need a broader prevention response.	4.64
To respond to youth gangs, we need a broader diversion and intervention response.	4.56
Front line service providers in Ottawa require training on youth gang issues.	4.40
The youth gang issue in Ottawa is largely driven by the illicit drug trade and other criminal markets.	4.13
We can learn a lot about the youth gang situation by talking to gang affiliated youth.	4.04
The youth gang issue in Ottawa is largely driven by location (neighbourhoods).	3.91
The youth gang issue in Ottawa is largely driven by socioeconomic conditions.	3.67
The community sees the youth gang issue as one with which the Ottawa Police and other criminal justice system actors must principally contend.	3.60
The youth gang issue in Ottawa is largely driven by lack of school success.	3.58
I have good knowledge of the youth gang situation in Ottawa.	3.52

The youth gang issue in Ottawa is largely driven by lack of family connection.	3.38
Myself and/or my organization has adequate knowledge of the risk and protective factors underlying gang affiliation.	3.32
Confidentiality concerns are a barrier to inter-agency collaboration and communication.	3.28
Myself and/or my organization has adequate knowledge of international best practices in youth gang prevention.	2.88
I believe gang exit programs may be effective in helping youth leave gangs without serious repercussion.	2.72
There is a high degree of collaboration and commitment among Ottawa community agencies/partners with respect to dealing with the youth gang issue.	2.60
There is a high degree of inter-agency communication in Ottawa with respect to youth gang issues, incidents, problems and opportunities.	2.60
The Ottawa Police Service is well prepared to deal with the youth gang situation from an intervention, diversion, investigation and suppression perspective.	2.44
To respond to youth gangs, we need a broader police suppression response.	2.32
There are sufficient prevention and early intervention programs in place in Ottawa for youth at-risk of gang involvement.	1.96
Schools and educators are well equipped and prepared to deal with youth gangs and youth gang members.	1.96
There are sufficient after school programs for young people.	1.92
There is sufficient political willingness to address the root causes of gang formation in Ottawa.	1.88
There are sufficient community-based diversion programs in place in Ottawa to deal with youth who have involved themselves in youth gang related crimes or anti-social behaviour.	1.88
The social service sector and youth serving agencies in Ottawa have sufficient capacity (physical, financial and human resources) to meet the challenges posed by youth gangs.	1.84
As a community, we have adequate services to address youth gangs in Ottawa.	1.80
In Ottawa, we do a good job educating youth about the dangers of youth gangs and gang violence.	1.76
There is sufficient money available in Ottawa to respond to youth gangs.	1.72
There are sufficient programs in place in Ottawa for post-incarcerated youth (re-integration programs).	1.68
Our custody facilities are effective at reforming and rehabilitating youth involved with gang related or other crimes.	1.56
Parents/caregivers of Ottawa youth have a good level of awareness about youth gang issues.	1.54

Commentary

Perhaps in keeping with the spirit and intent of Crime Prevention Ottawa and the youth gang working group, respondents expressed the highest agreement with respect to the notions that Ottawa requires a broader prevention response (4.64) as well as broader intervention/diversion response (4.56) to address youth gangs. With respect to the statement that Ottawa needs a broader police suppression response, survey respondents expressed slight disagreement (2.32).

In terms of possible drivers (e.g., major influences contributing to growth of a problem) of the youth gang situation, the strongest agreement was expressed with respect to the illicit drug trade and other criminal markets (4.13), followed by location (3.91), socioeconomic conditions(3.67), lack of school success (3.58) and lack of family connection (3.38).

With respect to the related topics of education and awareness, there was strong agreement that front line service providers in Ottawa require training on youth gang issues (4.40). Respondents indicated that they had what might be judged as a reasonable level of knowledge about the youth gang issue (3.52), a reasonably adequate knowledge of the risk and protective factors underlying gang affiliation (3.32), but perhaps lacked confidence in their knowledge of international best practices in youth gang prevention (2.88). Moreover, respondents disagreed that in Ottawa, a good job is done educating youth about the dangers of youth gangs and gang violence (1.76), and expressed even stronger disagreement that parents/caregivers of Ottawa youth have a good level of awareness about youth gang issues (1.54). In general, the author of this report believes we can deduce from the commentary that respondents believe that more can be done to equip front line service providers, youth and parents/caregivers about youth gangs.

With respect to the issue of inter-agency dealings within the City of Ottawa, there was a marginal level of agreement that confidentiality concerns are a barrier to inter-agency collaboration and communication (3.28). Moreover, there was slight disagreement that there is a high degree of inter-agency communication in Ottawa with respect to youth gang issues, incidents, problems and opportunities (2.60), and also slight disagreement that there is a high degree of collaboration and commitment among Ottawa community agencies/partners with respect to dealing with the youth gang issue (2.60).

In terms of the issue of agency or stakeholder preparedness to deal with the youth gang issue, respondents expressed slight disagreement that the Ottawa Police Service is well prepared to deal with the youth gang situation from an intervention, diversion, investigation and suppression perspective (2.44). Moreover, respondents disagreed that schools and educators are well equipped and prepared to deal with youth gangs and youth gang members (1.96). From a social services sector perspective, respondents disagreed that the social service sector and youth serving agencies in Ottawa have sufficient capacity (physical, financial and human resources) to meet the challenges posed by youth gangs (1.84).

A consistent level of disagreement was reserved with respect to the availability of various programs, services and resources to deal with the youth gang issue. These include that there are sufficient prevention and early intervention programs in place in Ottawa for youth at-risk of gang involvement (1.96); there are sufficient after school programs for young people (1.92); there are sufficient community-based diversion programs in place in Ottawa to deal with youth who have involved themselves in youth gang related crimes or anti-social behaviour (1.88); as a community, we have adequate services to address youth gangs in Ottawa (1.80) and, there are sufficient programs in place in Ottawa for post-incarcerated youth (re-integration programs)(1.68). If it can properly be considered a resource, which we believe it ought to be, respondents disagreed that there is sufficient political willingness to address the root causes of gang formation in Ottawa (1.88).

Finally, with respect to custody facilities, respondents expressed a strong level of disagreement that they are effective at reforming and rehabilitating youth involved with gang related or other crimes.

3.2 Supplemental Questions

In addition, we provided a number of options to the statement “The following programs and services are useful in preventing gang involvement”. Findings are as follows:

Program or Service	Score
Life skills development programs	4.60
Long-term mentoring programs	4.48
Organized after-school sports, recreation and leisure activities	4.44
Group/one on one counselling for conduct disordered youth	4.24
Programs to address early identified aggressive children	4.08
Career or job training	4.04
Programs to create stronger bonds between children and parents	4.04
Alternative school programs	4.04
Supervised homework clubs	4.00
Enhanced English as a second language (ESL) training	3.20

Commentary

With the exception of enhanced ESL training, respondents expressed a strong level of agreement that the programs and services listed were useful in preventing gang involvement. Life skills development, long term mentoring and organized after-school sports, recreation and leisure activities led the way, a theme that re-surfaced repeatedly during the key informant interviews as the reader will soon discover.

Results From Key Informant Interviews

Astwood interviewed a total of 33 key informants for this project with representation from education, law enforcement/criminal justice system, social services sector and the community at large. Each key informant was asked a series of eight questions, as follows:

1. What is your assessment as to the state of youth gangs in Ottawa?
2. Are there particular neighbourhoods or communities that are more challenged by youth gang issues?
3. What do you believe are the principal reasons why some youth at risk in Ottawa join gangs?
4. What kinds of programs or services do you believe are effective in preventing youth at risk from joining gangs?
5. What programs/services in Ottawa are most effective in dealing with youth who are already involved in a gang?
6. In Ottawa, what would you consider the biggest gaps in service delivery/program availability insofar as youth gang prevention is concerned? Are there neighbourhoods which are underserved?
7. In your view, what are the key factors for success underlying a youth gang prevention strategy for Ottawa?
8. What do you consider to be the biggest barrier(s) to addressing youth gang prevention issues in Ottawa?

We have grouped and summarized the main themes, ideas and issues raised by key informants for each question above, along with our observations and commentary. Italicized text is used to denote direct quotations. To maintain the confidentiality of key informants, as was most of their request, neither our summary of issues raised or direct quotations have been attributed to specific individuals.

Question 1

What is your assessment as to the state of youth gangs in Ottawa?

This question engendered a wide range of response, which seems to be indicative of a lack of broad based consensus in Ottawa as to the scope and dimension of the youth gang issue.

At one end of spectrum, there were a small number of respondents who believed that the state of youth gangs in Ottawa was overblown, that is, the actual size of the problem was less than the perceived size of the problem. One key informant suggested that *“Crime Prevention Ottawa and the Ottawa Police Service are totally exaggerating the size of the problem and that there were only a small handful of*

hardcore gang members in Ottawa...it does a disservice to young people in Ottawa to equate the problem in this way". Similarly, there were several individuals who felt that while the issue of youth gangs has much greater profile than, say, five years ago, they were not convinced that there was indeed more youth gang members active in the city than ever before, suggesting that the collective anxiety about youth gangs was "*media generated*" or facilitated by the Ottawa Police Service "*as they want more money for their guns and gangs taskforce*".

At the opposite end of the spectrum, there were a small number of key informants who believed that the problem was significant and growing rapidly, and that that which we were seeing was just "*the tip of the iceberg*". An individual suggested that youth (and street) gangs were "*becoming one of the largest and most resource intensive criminal elements in the region*", and therefore suggested that aggressive action must be taken to curtail their further growth. Another individual agreed that the problem was significant, especially since the individual's notion of "gang" was broader than the definition offered and extended to "*groupings of provocative youth involved in conflict*" that could then escalate to traditional gang activity. In other words, this individual saw that the large – and growing – "feeder system" of at-risk and anti-social youth to essentially be part and parcel of the overall youth gang dynamic. One key informant suggested that the youth gang situation was essentially an ethnic problem and one officially out of control, "*the bitter harvest of indifference on the part of the City of Ottawa, the Ottawa Police Service and the Ottawa Community Housing Corporation*".

Generally, we observed that the majority of key informant response clustered around the perception that the youth gang issue was growing, but that it was not out of control. A selection of commentary to illustrate this observation follows:

- *Youth gangs are a growing problem and the Ottawa Police Service and its community partners must do a better job at connecting at-risk youth early to the support they need.*
- *The problem is growing, but it is by no means out of control. Ottawa is not Toronto or Winnipeg, and I see no public panic, although the average person on the street is pretty unaware.*
- *I have been told by others that the problem exists but is not out of control. However, what I am concerned with is the possible size of the problem ten years from now. What would the problem look like today if we took action ten years ago I ask?*
- *For some people the problem is overblown, but we see it everyday at the front lines. It is a serious problem that could get a lot worse, depending on the moves we make in the next decade.*
- *Definitely there are gangs in Ottawa...more and more of them!*
- *The problem is underreported, especially in Vanier and in the young Aboriginal community.*
- *Youth gangs are living, they do exist, but they are not growing by leaps and bounds. I see concentric circles of intensity – hard core at centre, fringe members on the outside – so all gangsters are not the same by any means.*
- *It is an ever increasing problem in Ottawa, both in terms of numbers and level of violence and severity of victimization.*

- *It is getting worse in all the schools, but what we see mostly is an increase in wannabe behaviour. These are youth, mostly boys 14 to 16, that are acting “gangsta” because they think it’s cool. These are the youth we need to reach before they fall into the actual trap of the gang.*

Setting aside the issue of the relative size and severity of the youth gang issue, there was a great deal of similarity in response by key informants in respect to the characteristics of the youth gang issue. Some of the characteristics commonly cited include:

- Great increase is so-called “wannabe” behaviour, that is, youth who were “acting the part but not playing the part” of gang members, but nonetheless were placing themselves at risk of recruitment or victimization at the hands of actual youth gangs members.
- More female involvement in gangs, with roles including girlfriend of member, affiliate, actual gang member or gang “worker”. On this latter point, key informants observed more involvement of females in supporting criminal activities (holding and transporting drugs), and noted a troubling rise in teenage prostitution rings managed by youth/street gangs.
- The problem is concentrated in marginalized youth, including youth of lower socioeconomic status and youth of new Canadian families.
- Higher degree of gang involvement perceived of youth who were either not in school or had persistent truancy issues.
- Involvement of children (“pee wee” gangsters) as young as 8 to 10, especially in densely populated social housing communities known to have active gang rivalries.
- Increased level of drug dealing, even including children aged 10 to 12 years.
- Despite young age of gang members, perceived linkages with older street gang members or traditional organized crime groups (for access to drugs for resale at street level).
- Youth gangs are coalescing wherever other young people coalesce, including schools, parties, dances, shopping malls, transit routes, sports events, etc.
- General increase in personal robberies, intimidations, swarmings, and threats amongst youth.
- Increased use of violence, both to “settle the score”, as well as to “have fun” (form of sport and recreation as it were). More use of assaultive weapons, especially guns and knives.
- Generally, more provocative displays of gang affiliations, especially in specific neighbourhoods and surrounding schools, including signs, colours, dress code, graffiti vandalism. In this respect, there is an emerging territoriality of youth gangs, in contrast to older, better organized street gangs which tend to revolve around economic territoriality (not necessarily community specific).
- The “suburbanization” of youth gangs was cited on several occasions, with youth gang members and wannabes being seen in bedroom communities such as Stittsville, Kanata, Barrhaven and Orleans.

As a general proposition, key informants had a solid level of awareness of youth gang issues and the leading consensus position is that the youth gang problem, however one might define it at the present time, is one that will grow through time.

The author of this report believes it is worthy to ask the question: “Just how does Ottawa compare to other Canadian cities on the youth gang issue?”. Relative to other large Canadian cities, the estimated size of Ottawa’s youth gang problem compares favourably. Data from the *2002 Canadian Police Survey on Youth Gangs* (authored by Michael Chettleburgh), in addition to the author’s estimate for 2007 (which will be confirmed in Spring 2008 with the release of the *2007 Canadian Police Survey on Youth Gangs* by Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada), show that Ottawa’s youth gang problem reflects the majority of the key informant’s position that the problem exists, but that it is not out of control:

City	2002 Report	2007 Estimate	Density/1,000 pop/based on 2007 estimate
Winnipeg	2,000	3,000	4.32
Saskatoon	580	900	3.86
Regina	275	500	2.57
Toronto	1,100	3,000	1.23
Peel Region	960	1,200	1.03
Edmonton	300	600	0.58
Vancouver	550	1,200	0.57
Ottawa	250	600	0.53
Calgary	250	500	0.46
Montreal	500	1,000	0.28

As the table above demonstrates, on a density basis (gang members per 1,000 population, based on 2007 estimates provided by the author), Ottawa is among the lowest in the country with cities like Calgary, Vancouver and Edmonton. Compared to Winnipeg, Saskatoon, Regina and even Toronto, Ottawa’s gang problem is nonetheless real but cannot properly be judged to be beyond control or of “epidemic” proportions.

Question 2

Are there particular neighbourhoods or communities that are more challenged by youth gang issues?

Notwithstanding the comment earlier in respect to the suburbanization of youth gangs, there was a great deal of consensus amongst key informants as to the neighbourhoods or communities that are most challenged by youth gang issues. There has been sensitivities expressed to the author of this report in naming these specific communities, so as to not stigmatize the majority of law-abiding residents that live there, the names of these specific communities have been deleted in this report. For the purposes of the report, however, we suggest that the majority of youth gang issues reside in some specific communities inside the Greenbelt, with further data analysis required to specify the communities and areas most affected by youth gang issues (see Recommendation #3, page 39).

During our interviews, many respondents were quick to point out that the preponderance of the youth gang issue, in their opinion, is associated with high density, low income communities of which there are several in the region.

We should note, however, that several key informants made the point that while it is their opinion that youth gangs and their members disproportionately come from these so-called “troubled” communities, youth gangs are naturally expansive and citizens outside these communities should not rest with a false sense of comfort that their communities are somehow immune from gang violence and activity.

Several key informers observed that in some of these communities, at-risk youth as well as gang-involved youth were beginning to demonstrate a strong level of attachment to their community, so much so that they perceive themselves as “protectors of the neighbourhood”. The geographic territoriality of youth and street gangs is well known, and these key informants suggested that in the past few years, this level of attachment has grown remarkably. The impact of this perverse attachment, several noted, was that youth considered “outside” the community (or outside the dominant gang(s) operating in that community) were not welcome and therefore could be the subject of attack if they transgressed community borders. A key informer from the west end of Ottawa observed that youth from one area will no longer cross over to rival areas, even to take advantage of pro-social programs and services that may be offered in that community. Of particular note, several key informers suggested that youth as young as 5 and 6 were beginning to demonstrate this territoriality through their speech (“I’m from “Community X”I’m from “Community Y”, even if they were not gang involved, but this portended, in their opinion, the likelihood that they soon too may be gang involved.

Question 3

What do you believe are the principal reasons why some youth at risk in Ottawa join gangs?

This question also elicited a broad array of response, with key informants citing reasons which are well known in the literature to be risk factors for gang affiliation. The key reasons expressed by key informants in order of frequency of response (n = times mentioned), and our summary of their commentary, are as follows:

Affiliation/sense of belonging (n=27)

This was the most cited reason for why at-risk youth sought participation in a gang. One key informant made the point that *“good gangs and good families essentially provide the very same thing – structure, hierarchy, acceptable modes of conduct, and a sense of belonging”*. Several key informants noted that youth were particularly at-risk if parents/caregivers were either absent from their lives or otherwise uninvolved, or if youth had few positive role models to look up to. Youth in care (foster homes, group homes, etc.) were observed to be particularly vulnerable to gangs who could provide the youth a sense of affiliation and belonging. According to one key informant, *“Group homes are a contagion environment and we need to look at the level of supervision and programming offered in each if we wish to curtail the growth of gangs”*. Essentially, most key informants observed that in the absence of pro-social groups, activities or individuals that could provide youth with a strong sense of belonging and affiliation, a street gang could otherwise play that same role.

Protection (n=22)

Youth that live in communities that have a higher incidence of crime, victimization and gang activity may seek the protection of gangs. *“For many youth, either they are going to be a victim, or they are going to victimize, so the choice is sometimes a very easy one”*. Several key informants noted the troubling rise in criminal activities such as swarmings, personal robberies and general intimidation in and around schools and communities. For at-risk youth subjected to these things, participation in a gang can provide a sense of security and of course compatriots to defend oneself.

Poverty/access to lucrative drug trade and other criminal markets (n=20)

Several key informants spoke of the vibrant drug trade in Ottawa, especially in cannabis, crack cocaine, powder cocaine and ecstasy, as well as other lucrative criminal markets like teenage prostitution, gambling operations, extortion and gun dealing. Many key respondents cited the pull of these markets and the potential profits young (and poor) people could make as a primary driver of why youth were joining gangs, especially for youth that were depressed economically. While several key informants suggested that the pull of the drug trade was powerful when the option was a minimum wage foodservice job, others suggested that many at-risk youth in Ottawa, who would otherwise accept a minimum wage job, were not having success in obtaining such jobs, and therefore were “forced” to earn income by criminal means.

Lack of school engagement (n=19)

Lack of engagement with school was broadly cited by key informants as a leading cause of why at-risk youth join gangs. *“If youth are not in school, due to truancy or expulsion, then they are at risk of being socialized on the street by gangs”*. Two key informants noted that a young person need not be expelled or absent from school to be at risk. Rather, these individuals noted that the youth may be in attendance but not engaged in the school experience, which still placed them at risk because *“school is a training ground for thugs as it gives youth the opportunity to harass, bully, exclude then ultimately engage in gang activities”*, said one.

Lack of parental supervision (n=16)

Many key informants observed that the at-risk youth they see have troubled family lives. Young boys with single-parent led families (especially led by young women) were seen to be particularly at risk, but even youth of two-parent families were seen to be at risk, if the parents were struggling to provide for their families economically. Irrespective of the composition of the family, key informants noted that the at-risk youth that tended to avoid falling into gang activity were those with involved, aware parents or other close adult guardianship.

Anti-social/gang involved associates (n=11)

Peer pressure stemming from anti-social or gang involved associates was a commonly cited as placing youth at-risk of gang involvement. *“For at-risk youth, friends really do matter”* suggested one respondent.

Drug addictions (n=7)

Several key informants noted the connection between drug addiction and gang involvement, both as a means to access product for personal consumption as well as to sell to support a habit. Three key informants observed that this problem has grown more acute in the last three to five years in particular, due to the wide availability and dropping cost of street drugs, as well as the lack of youth drug addiction programs in the city (more on this later).

Normal risk taking of youth (n=6)

Several key informants noted that engaging in risky behaviour – drug taking, unsafe sex, gang involvement - was normal activity for some youth. Youth more amenable to risk were therefore at higher risk of gang involvement, irrespective of the other conditions in their lives.

Status/gang member as top of community (n=4)

In some communities, the leader of the gang is perceived as the most influential member of the community. For some at-risk youth, key informants observed, the leader of the gang becomes the person most admired, with the “price of admission” to access that person being membership in the gang.

Glamour of being a gangster/media influences (n=2)

Media influences were cited by two key informants as a reason why youth join gangs. In particular, violent video games, violent rap and hip hop music and the overall “gangster chic” culture was cited as powerful influence on impressionable youth. These informants suggested that while the fascination with the gangster culture may start and end with dress and speech for some youth, others who adopted this “brand” were exposing themselves to the recruitment efforts of real gang members. One of the informants noted that the hip hop culture was not solely to blame, *“as we as a society have yet not decided our position on violence – do we accept it or do we reject it?”*.

Pride in community/perceived protection of community (n=2)

As was noted in the ending commentary in question 2, two key informants highlighted that youth are joining gangs to support their community, in a sense to protect and strengthen it via a more robust gang presence.

Familial gang affiliation (n=2)

Two key informants noted that Ottawa is beginning to see the rise of familial and even multi-generational gang affiliation. In the case of the former, informants observed more and more cases of older gang involved youth recruiting younger siblings to participate in gangs and gang activities. As well, informants suggested that male adults, especially from refugee communities who settled in Ottawa in the mid 1990’s, were now fathers of young gang involved youth, therefore perpetrating a cycle of multi-generational gang involvement.

Mental health issues (n=1)

The existence of mental health issues or challenges was cited by only one individual as a reason why youth join gangs.

Cultural affiliation (n=1)

One key informant noted that the youth he works with were at-risk of gang involvement because the “gang is his community was aligned along a single ethnic line, and joining the gang was a demonstration of ethnic pride”. From this perspective, joining a gang can be seen to be primarily motivated by a sense of belonging and affiliation, rather than the other commonly cited reasons (protection, risk taking behaviour, etc.).

Lack of life skills/decision making skills (n=1)

One key informant noted that youth with poor decision-making skills (or more generally, poor life skills) were at greater risk of joining gangs.

Question 4

What kinds of programs or services do you believe are effective in preventing youth at risk from joining gangs?

Key informants demonstrated a great deal of insight and creativity with respect to the programs and services they believed are effective in preventing youth at risk from joining gangs. In order of frequency of response (n = times mentioned), results are as follows, along with our summary of informants' commentary and our general observations:

Intensive life skills development (n=29)

Early intervention programs that attempt to teach youth aged 5 and above important life skills such as resisting peer pressure, resolving and avoiding conflict and making good decisions, among other things (e.g., the former *Project Early Intervention* in Banff Ledbury was cited as an example several times). Informants also expressed a need for life skills development program for older youth (10 to 16), both to reinforce the life skills noted above, but as well as teach life skills to assist in transition through adolescence to adulthood. Examples cited include workplace skills and healthy relationships. One key informant noted that "the addition to life skills programming of viable employment opportunities and apprentice programs would allow these youth to lead a prosocial life. These programs would have to come early on but could be built into the life skills programs that assist with resume writing, gaining hands on experience etc."

Monitored/organized after school programs (n=27)

Virtually every key informant expressed the position that adult or youth worker monitored and organized after school programs of almost any description were effective in preventing gang involvement. Especially important was the period between 3 and 7 p.m., a time when many youth are unattended due to parents' work schedules.

Organized sports, recreation, leisure and arts programs (n=26)

Most key informants described the value of organized programs of sports, recreation, leisure and artistic expression for young people, especially those made available to youth after school and on the weekends. "You just have to find a hook for an at-risk youth, something that they will grab onto rather than that of a gang" said one key informant. Several mentioned that a greater diversity of programs are required to attract youth who may otherwise not participate in traditional competitive sports.

One key informant noted the importance of programming based on evidence-based approaches, noting "When we talk about programs we can put into place to prevent or assist youth in not joining in gang activity, e.g., recreation programs, we have to ensure that the programs rely on evidence based research, that is, what does the literature tell us works in addressing criminogenic factors. This approach has been implemented in Youth Justice Services from Probation officers to custodial facilities and community based YJ funded programs. If we do not adhere to the risk principle (e.g., providing minimal service for

low risk youth and more intensive intervention for high risk youth) then we run the risk of making the situation worse and creating harm.”

Academic support/homework clubs (n=24)

Programs to help young people do well in school and stay in and engaged in school were cited frequently as protective of future gang involvement. Mention was made repeatedly of the value of after school homework clubs, where youth could obtain assistance in completing their school work in a safe and comfortable environment. In addition, academic tutoring programs for youth with specific unmet needs (language skills, basic literacy skills) were considered protective as well.

Primary prevention programs (n=23)

Many key informers spoke of the potential effectiveness of primary prevention programs that addressed the issue of youth/street gangs. Much in the same way as anti-smoking and safe sex prevention programs have shown themselves to be effective in reducing the risky behaviour of youth, prevention programs targeted to a broad range of youth - including low-risk, at-risk and high-risk youth – were believed to be an effective gang prevention strategy. Of note, informants suggested the programs should be fact based and not incorporate “scared straight” style messaging. Indeed, several key informers suggested that prevention programs should be developed in collaboration with youth, as they were knowledgeable about the issue and could communicate concepts in a manner that other youth could understand and appreciate. Reference was made to Canterbury High School and the program they conducted a few years back with the Ottawa Police Service on the topic of drug facilitated sexual assault.

Transition services for new Canadians (n=19)

Better support for new Canadians was cited extensively by key informants as an important gang prevention strategy. Specific support components included expanded English as a Second Language (ESL) training, income support, housing and transportation assistance, etc.

Mentoring Programs (n=18)

Individual and group mentoring programs for at risk youth were cited by many key informants to be highly protective for future gang involvement.

Parent support programs (n=14)

A common theme expressed by key informants was the value of parent support programs. Specific examples cited included general parenting sessions, how to teach life skills, how to set and maintain boundaries, how to consequence children, how to communicate with teenagers, etc. Informants specifically noted the value of these sessions for new Canadian parents, who they felt sometimes struggled with the disparity between their traditional cultural values/norms, and those of Canada in which their children often quickly adopted. As one informant noted, *“the tension between the old ways of the parents and the new ways of the children was motivating some youth to join gangs”*.

Gang awareness programs for educators and parents (n=13)

Several key informants made the point that parents and indeed many educators had a low level of awareness about youth gang issues. Therefore, programs (courses, parent information sessions, public awareness programs and materials) that sought to equip individuals with information about gangs and the gang culture were thought to be protective for at-risk youth. Key informants cited issues such as: signs of gang affiliation; risk and protective factors associated with gang involvement; what to do if you suspect a child is at risk of joining a gang, etc., as important components in this kind of awareness programming.

People that care (n=10)

While not considered a program or service per se, many key informants spoke of the sheer protective value of people (youth workers, teachers, etc.) that cared for young, at-risk youth, that were there for them when they needed them. Perhaps most important, key informants spoke of the need for continuity and long term engagement of these individuals, which gives youth a sense of stability and hope for the future.

Visible SRO presence in schools (n=9)

Many key informers spoke of the tremendous value of the Ottawa Police Service School Resource Officer (SRO) program to augment youth's sense of safety in their schools and develop trusting relationships with police.

Character Development (n=9)

Many key informants referred to the need for communities, schools, families and other stakeholders to enhance their emphasis on character education, especially for young at-risk youth. Character education is an umbrella term generally used to describe the teaching of children in a manner that will help them develop as personal and social beings. Key informants referred to several concepts that fall under this term including social and emotional learning, moral reasoning/cognitive development, life skills education, health education, violence prevention, critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and conflict resolution and mediation. Generally, informants described the need for adults to do a better job at teaching children and adolescents values including honesty, stewardship, kindness, generosity, courage, freedom, justice, equality, and respect.

Psychosocial counselling (n=7)

Services to help at-risk youth deal with both the pressures in their lives and the issues of their past were noted to be effective from a gang prevention perspective. Several key informants described the tragic backgrounds of many at-risk youth, especially those from countries experiencing civil war and strife, famine and other major events. For many of these youth with unresolved issues, *"participation in a street gang is really no big deal, especially when you are accustomed to seeing a level of violence we cannot imagine"*.

Strong anti-gang policies at school (n=7)

Several key informants noted the need for secondary schools to have in place strong and well promulgated anti-gang policies in place, supported by stringent enforcement of the policies by educators and administrative staff. Informants described the need for schools to remain as “safe places” for youth, and not the “*roving grounds of gangs recruiting and selling drugs to at risk youth*”.

Community house programming (n=7)

Given the perceived (and perhaps real) concentration of youth gang members and at-risk youth within social housing communities, many key informants cited the effectiveness of community houses and their hosted programs for gang prevention. However, the existence of community houses alone was considered secondary to the quality, consistency and engagement of community house staff. On this point, several key respondents spoke of the tremendous range of quality across the city in regards to community house programming and their staff. Indeed, one key informant suggested that the community house proximal to his facility was “*working at cross purposes to our organization.....we enforce strict rules of conduct here, but the community house does not, which sends mixed messages to youth*”.

Leadership training (n=4)

Several key informants noted that the majority of youth that joined gangs, in their experience, were followers. Programs that taught leadership skills to at-risk youth, as well as those that gave youth the opportunity to practice and perfect these skills, were noted to be protective of future gang involvement.

Cultural reclamation for Aboriginal youth (n=3)

A few key informants noted the troubling growth in aboriginal youth joining gangs and cited so-called “cultural reclamation” programs as effective. Specifically, these informants believed that the loss of traditional aboriginal culture was a risk factor for future criminality, and therefore a restoration of this culture could produce resiliency in Aboriginal youth. Program ideas included character education through The Seven Grandfather Teachings, Aboriginal heritage activities (wood carving, regalia making, longhouse teachings, sweat lodges, traditional healing ceremonies, etc.).

Neighbourhood watch (n=2)

Two key informants spoke of the effectiveness of neighbourhood watch programs and the overall value of engaged and vigilant communities working in partnership with the Ottawa Police Service to prevent crime and gang activity.

Art therapy (n=2)

Individual and family art therapy programs were cited by two key informants as effective in preventing gang involvement. Through art making and relating to the therapist, with the art as an interface, these programs can help individuals develop healthier ways to manage life, gain insights into the root causes of unhappiness, and experiment with change.

School transition worker programs (n=2)

Two key informants noted the gang prevention value of what they termed “school transition workers”. These were described as youth workers that supported young people new to a community (especially new Canadians) by orienting them to their new school, introducing them to youth serving organizations, making introductions to community houses and obtaining memberships, and generally, acting as a role model and friend.

Excursion programs (n=2)

Two key informants noted the value of taking at-risk youth from troubled communities to other communities, so as to broaden their horizons, meet new people, and simply “*get away from the drama in their lives for a little while*”. These excursions included day trips and summer camp programs.

Wraparound approach that follows families and youth (n=2)

Two key informants referred to the gang prevention value of wraparound approaches, a program of unique community services and natural supports that are individualized for a child and family to achieve a positive set of outcomes over the long term.

Home visitation by public health nurses (n=1)

One key informant described the value of having public health nurses visit families with young children (age 0 to 6) periodically to check the functioning of the family unit, assess unmet health needs, look for signs of child maltreatment, provide education and awareness resources, make referrals to other social service providers, etc. In this person’s view, “*an investment in this kind of intensive review and oversight would cut in half the incidence of future gang involvement*”.

Reformed gang member talks (n=1)

One key informer suggested that school-based presentations by reformed gang members would be an effective gang prevention strategy. Assuming the talks were made by individuals who were proven to be non-gang involved, and that the content delivered did not sensationalize the gang issue or demonstrate to youth that “*you can be a gang member, do bad things, then be a motivational speaker*”, this style of prevention program may have merit.

Question 5

What programs/services in Ottawa are most effective in dealing with youth who are already involved in a gang?

This question did not render a great deal of response from key informants. Several key informants spoke of the difficulty and risk in dealing with gang affiliated youth, as well as lack of youth worker skills base to deal with gang affiliated youth. Generally, very few key informants could refer to a program that was specifically designed to address youth who were already gang affiliated. Those few

programs/services that were cited in the city as effective in dealing with youth already involved in a gangs include:

- Ottawa Police Service Youth Intervention/Diversion office.
- Youth Services Bureau programs including one-on-one anger management program, downtown services and drop-in, community drop-ins and SafetyNet program.
- Wabano Centre Cyber Café program
- Somali Centre for Family Services
- Boys and Girls Club of Ottawa programs
- MST program at William Hay Centre.

Question 6

In Ottawa, what would you consider the biggest gaps in service delivery/program availability insofar as youth gang prevention is concerned? Are there neighbourhoods which are underserved?

Perhaps not surprisingly, many of the programs and services cited by key informants to be effective from a youth gang prevention perspective were also those cited as lacking in the City of Ottawa.

Responses from key informants are as follows:

- **Broad public awareness programs (n=24):** A major gap in the City of Ottawa was the lack of public awareness or education in respect to the gang issue. Save and except for the recent Ottawa Police Service release of their “Gang Card” - a new tool for parents to help them detect early signs of gang involvement with their children – most informants decried the lack of awareness building in the city.
- **Ottawa Police Service SRO program (n=18):** Key informants were overwhelmingly positive in their assessment of the value of the Ottawa Police Service School Resource Officer (SRO) program. However, most informants believed that the program is over-tasked and that the corps of twenty-five or so SROs is inadequate to cover the needs of Ottawa’s schools. For schools which have a larger than average population of gang-affiliated youth, several key informants believed that if each did not have their own dedicated SRO, this would represent a gap in service delivery.
- **Youth Outreach Programs (n=15):** Several key informants noted that many at-risk youth, even in the presence of supportive programs, will not always attend or participate due to a host of factors including negative peer pressure, requirement to act according to defined rules and regulations, location (e.g., if program is located in a so-called “rival” neighbourhood), perceived cost of participation, perception that it is not “cool” to participate in community programs, lack of parental permission or consent). Key informants therefore noted as a gap that there was not enough youth outreach efforts happening in the city, including communication programs, door to door visits, school presentations, etc. Related to this, several key informants described the

difficulty in securing resources to fund broader youth outreach programs, and therefore this was cited as a gap in identifying and serving at-risk youth.

- **Community house programs (n=12):** Key informants noted that the inventory of community house programs was a major gap in service delivery and program availability. More money from the City of Ottawa to augment these program ought to be considered.
- **Program space (n=11):** Availability of cost effective multi-purpose space in City-owned facilities was quoted several times as a constraint with respect to program and service delivery.
- **Drug treatment programs for youth (n=9):** Many key informants highlighted the connection between gang activity and drug addiction on the part of many youth. A major identified gap in the City of Ottawa was therefore a dedicated drug treatment centre or program for youth, with a special program allocated for youth who were at risk of gang affiliation.
- **Youth-led prevention programming (n=8):** Several key informants noted as a gap the lack of resource investment (money, adult mentorship, materials, access, etc.) in youth led prevention programs. Informants noted that as a community, we needed to *“give youth a bigger voice on this issue, because in many ways they understand it much better than we do”*.
- **Early intervention programs (n=7):** A consistent theme expressed was the general lack of early intervention, “success by six” type programs throughout the city of Ottawa.
- **Post-incarceration support/custody transition and re-integration (n=8):** Many key informants noted the challenges inherent in rehabilitating or reforming youth while they were in custody. While certain facilities were noted for their good work in this area (e.g., William Hay Centre), several informants expressed the need for further investment in post-custody re-integration programs, wherein youth (who who previously non-gang involved) could obtain counselling, assistance with housing, intensive mentoring, job training, etc. However, one key informant from the probation sector countered these positions by arguing that Ottawa has done of good job in this regard. The quotation is detailed and has been carried in its entirety: *“Probation Services utilizes a Risk/Need Assessment Tool which identifies the youth's risks and needs and then provides intervention that targets that risk. This tool is used by all Probation Officers in Ontario and was designed by Dr. Hoge and Dr. Andrews at Carleton University based on the research literature about what works. In many situations, the PO may refer to a community based agency such as the Non-Residential Attendance Centre operated by the John Howard Society. This program is an evidenced based program that targets these risk areas but in a way that allows the youth to learn new skills via role playing, repetition, structured discussions etc. There also have an interactive school program which has enjoyed success in the short period of time it has been operating. Project Trading Places is a vocational program at Rideau High School for youth at conflict with the law to learn a trade while also garnering academic success. Skill acquisition, mentorship and having a positive relationship are all effective in reducing the youth's risk to re-offend, whether it is in a gang activity or not. In all cases where a young person is placed in custody, probation services in collaboration with the open or secure custody facility, starts working on reintegration almost as soon as the young person is detained. There are on-site programs that continue to work on issues that put that individual young person at risk; including clinical, educational, recreational programs. There is also a provincial Reintegration*

Support Fund that allows for funding for specialized services while the person is in custody but also to help bridge the transition to community life. Rehabilitation and reintegration are the cornerstones of the work Probation Services does. We enjoy tremendous collaboration with partners in the community, education and law enforcement but I agree much work still needs to be done to develop partnerships with our non-traditional partners.” The diversity in opinion may suggest not necessarily a polarization of opinion, but a lack of broad-based awareness throughout the city as to the true extent of re-integration programs available. This may be an issue to be highlighted in future prevention awareness programming the CPO wishes to undertake.

- **Programs targeted to young women/girls (n=6):** several informants spoke of the male dominated nature of the youth/street gang phenomenon but highlighted that a major gap in the city was specific prevention/intervention programs targeted to young females, who were increasingly involving themselves in gangs or becoming victimized by them (e.g., recruitment or forced participation in the sex trade).
- **Academic support (n=5):** while there are a number of home work clubs in operation throughout the city, there are perceived gaps in coverage in the city. Related to this, informants believed that not enough ESL classes are offered and those in place are not available when needed most by parents (in the evenings).
- **Community service programs for youth (n=4):** Informants spoke of the need for more community service opportunities for young people, to help instil in them civic pride and a sense of responsibility for those around them.
- **OPS YID office (n=4):** Several key respondents noted the small size and budget of this Ottawa Police Service office as a gap in service delivery.
- **Awareness/support programs for group homes and children in care (n=4):** Four key informers noted the gap in service delivery in respect to gang prevention messaging/educating/support for youth in care, especially those in group homes. This gap extends to those individuals and organizations that operate group homes in the Ottawa area.
- **Intensive supervision and mentorship for highest risk youth (n=3):** Three key informants spoke of the gap in service with respect to the identification of the highest risk youth (e.g., the top 5 to 15% based on risk factors) and then the intensive supervision and mentorship of these young people.
- **Trauma counselling (n=3):** Several Informants cited an inadequate number of programs for refugees, victims of war and violence/trauma are available.
- **Multi-systemic therapy programs (n=3):** Three key informants referred to inadequate MST and other family based treatment services being available in the city.
- **Lack of support for those willing to help (n=2):** Two key informants referred to the need for more supporting programs for those wishing to volunteer (training, counselling, materials, mentors, etc.).
- **Psycho-educational evaluations (n=2):** Gaps were cited in specific services or programs to identify youth at risk as well as their relative level of risk (risk/responsivity evaluation, level of social functioning using standardized instruments, etc.). Additional investments in this area

would allow for early detection and early intervention, including long-term wraparound approaches.

- **Programs that celebrate achievements of youth (n=2):** Several key informants spoke of the need for the community to more broadly and frequently celebrate the achievements of youth. This was seen to be important to send a message that most youth are law abiding and are committed to leading successful lives. Promoting the achievements of youth would also provide role models for at-risk youth.
- **Transitional home programs/youth shelters (n=1)**

Several key informants suggested that gaps in service delivery perhaps best could be demonstrated through Ottawa Police Service statistical analysis of youth crime patterns including suspected gang activity. As a general proposition, key informants indicated that investments to address service delivery gaps ought to be targeted to those communities deemed most at-risk.

Question 7

In your view, what are the key factors for success underlying a youth gang prevention strategy for Ottawa?

Nine key themes emerged in respect to the key factors for success underlying a youth gang prevention strategy for Ottawa:

A dedicated champion

Several respondents referred to the necessity of there being a youth gang prevention “champion” in the region. Crime Prevention Ottawa, and its youth gang committee, were singled out several times as the logical choice for this role, given the work it has done to date on the issue and its success in bringing together a wide range of stakeholders from the community. Going forward, CPO was seen as the vehicle through which a comprehensive, community-based youth gang prevention strategy could be designed, delivered, monitored and evaluated. Strong management skills at the CPO, if they were to act as community lead, were also seen as essential to success. Comparatively speaking, two key informants referred to CPO’s alignment with another successful model of community gang prevention, Edmonton’s Community Solution to Gang Violence.

A Firm Commitment to CPO by City/Regional Government

Key informants described the absolute necessity of City of Ottawa leadership, from the Mayor on down, making a strong public pronouncement on the youth gang issue, its impact on the city and the value of prevention programming. This strong “call to action” was considered essential to better establish the profile, legitimacy and value of the CPO working group on gangs.

Common Frame of Reference

Noted earlier, the range of opinion in the city about the size and extent of the youth gang issue is problematic for many stakeholders. Before a successful youth gang strategy can take root, a greater consensus must be formed in respect to what the city is dealing with, in terms of number of youth gang members, the locations of their activities, the nature of their activities, etc. Clearly, getting an accurate sense of the Ottawa youth gang problem is a challenging endeavour given the diversity of gangs and their activities. However, respondents noted that through the development and implementation of an Ottawa youth gang strategy, a real commitment must be maintained in defining and understanding the scope of the problem.

Multi-stakeholder Involvement

Continued broad representation from a wide diversity of stakeholders was seen as an essential piece underlying a youth gang prevention strategy. The composition of the current youth gang committee was viewed to be *"a good start"*, but several key informants noted the absence of some important players. Examples cited included: youth representation, community group representation, private sector business representation (e.g., especially mall operators), transit system representation, private citizens, charitable foundations, faith community representation, addictions community representation, representation from City economic development, parks and recreation and public health.

Greater Interagency Collaboration and Service Integration

Multi-stakeholder involvement is important to success, however, informants reiterated that this collaboration must come with a great deal of interagency collaboration and communication. As one informant correctly noted earlier *"we are dealing with common clients"*, and therefore the point is made that any youth gang strategy must be grounded in a spirit of cooperation across the city. Informants noted several examples of how this enhanced collaboration could be achieved: conduct city-wide inventory of programs and services to identify overlap; identify resources including program money and staff; develop specific service delivery policies and procedures to support interagency cooperation on a youth gang initiative; support implementation with evaluation to determine what works and what does not.

Enhanced Resourcing

An effective youth gang prevention strategy for Ottawa must be properly resourced with both money and additional human capital. Several respondents referred to the CPO's existing budget of some \$400,000 as *"inadequate"* to address the growing Ottawa youth gang issue. Respondents cited that additional money was needed for the following items: more *"seed"* investments in community-based pilot projects; additional human resources to evaluate programs and assist community groups in launching their programs with CPO guidance; the development of a comprehensive best and emerging practice *"knowledge-base"* that could be shared throughout the community.

Development of an interdisciplinary intervention team and the efficient coordination of outreach efforts

Several key informants noted that an effective youth gang strategy must be underpinned by an interdisciplinary intervention team that efficiently coordinates outreach staff whose job is to identify youth at-risk of gang involvement. In other words, the youth gang prevention strategy must include provision for resources on the street doing front line outreach work, and coordinating response amongst the appropriate community partner(s). Some key informants discussed the notion of this team being managed under the auspices of the CPO, but the majority opinion was that an experienced social service agency, on behalf of the strategy's constituents, should implement this function.

Evidence Based Orientation

In keeping with the mandate of Crime Prevention Ottawa, the youth gang strategy must be premised on evidence-based approaches known to address risk factors for future criminality and build resilience in at-risk youth.

Early Intervention Focus

Several key informers stressed that the Ottawa youth gang situation was not to be solved overnight and therefore an early intervention focus was essential to prevent a future generation of teenagers from becoming gang involved.

Question 8

What do you consider to be the biggest barrier(s) to addressing youth gang prevention issues in Ottawa?

Key informants were extremely candid with their comments in regards to youth gang prevention barriers in Ottawa. In order of frequency of response (n = times mentioned), results are as follows, along with our summary of informants' commentary and our general observations:

Money/lack of stability in core funding (n=26)

As to be expected, the largest barrier cited was lack of financial resources to fund programs and hire staff. Most key informants did not believe that new sources of money for youth gang prevention would be found, and that if an expanded prevention agenda was to be formulated, it would have to be funded from existing budgets. Informants spoke of the continued challenges in maintaining funding streams for existing core programs, and questioned the availability of resources to finance new youth gang prevention programs.

Lack of awareness (n=24)

Key informants described that outside of youth serving agencies and other community stakeholders who deal with youth gangs and other criminal justice matters, there is a low level of awareness in Ottawa in respect to youth gangs. This lack of awareness, several informants contended, extends to the general community as well as to community leaders and City Council. Absent broad community awareness on the issue, informants described the difficulties that would be faced by Crime Prevention Ottawa and other prevention organizations in securing financial resources for prevention programming.

Lack of knowledge of best practices/lack of evidence base (n=19)

Many key informants spoke of the absence of high quality, accessible information in respect to what works and what does not work from a youth gang prevention perspective. *"We are willing to do our part, but we really don't know where to start or where to make the best investments"* commented one informant, who spoke of the value of there being a *"practical, non-academic central repository of information on best and emerging practices, program descriptions, contact numbers, etc."*

Revenue generation/cost recovery policies of City of Ottawa (n=10)

Many key informants spoke of the tremendous array of physical facilities throughout the region (community centres, schools, libraries, multi-purpose centres, sports facilities), but noted that many community groups were unable to afford the rental and associated costs (insurance, maintenance, etc.) due to the cost recovery policies of the City of Ottawa.

Lack of resources and leadership at OCHC (n=9)

Several key respondents noted that a significant barrier to youth gang prevention in Ottawa was the state of communities operated by Ottawa Community Housing Corporation. Until OCHC took greater leadership and began to address some of the issues that *"help fuel gang activity in the projects"*, including but not limited to security, lighting, community house infrastructure, and quality of apartment

stock, the effectiveness of youth gang prevention efforts may be reduced. Two key informants noted that there should be OCHC representation on the CPO youth gang committee. In the abundance of fairness, however, representatives of the OCHC noted that while they recognized that much more had to be done from a prevention perspective, their current efforts were focused on cooperating with the Ottawa police to reduce the threats posed by street gang members. To bolster their commitment, OCHCC sought and obtained the support of the City of Ottawa to create a 20 person team of Community Safety Officers (Safer Communities Program) with a mandate to respond as expeditiously as possible to suspicious activities in OCHC communities. OCHC receives advice as well as information on trends by the Ottawa Guns and Gangs Unit of the Ottawa police. They have also launched a Healthy Communities Initiative beginning with a community survey of two pilot communities, which is seeking to identify tenant issues related to safety, crime, gangs as well as to encourage greater community engagement on issues affecting their communities. Once the pilot project is completed, a comprehensive plan will be developed and implemented in the rest of the OCHC communities. In addition, four Community Development Managers have been placed in the operational districts to provide greater focus on community and partnership development. To their credit, OCHC indicated that they needed to better communicate their plans and efforts to the community, and that a new communications planning exercise was underway to ensure all stakeholders recognize their commitment to address youth gang issues in OCHC communities.

Attitudinal Barriers (n=8)

Several key informants spoke of attitudinal barriers to effective and widespread prevention. Attitudinal barriers cited included: left versus right; tough on crime versus big on prevention; harm reduction versus abstinence. With respect to the issue of youth gang prevention, informants noted today's polarized position on gangs at the federal government level, that is, an emphasis on suppression versus prevention.

Lack of political will (n=7)

Related to the issue of money above, several key informants referred to the previous and present City Council's *"preoccupation with tax cuts"* as a major barrier to addressing youth gang prevention. Similarly, key informants did not believe that there was any interest, at City Hall, in increasing taxes or re-allocating money from other programs, to fund a broader youth gang prevention effort in Ottawa. In the words of one key informant, *"Despite the best efforts of Crime Prevention Ottawa to articulate this issue, I can't see that there is sufficient political will in Ottawa right now to tackle youth gangs beyond a suppression response..."*.

Stereotypes and racial prejudice (n=6)

Several key informants noted the barrier of persistent stereotyping and racial prejudice as a barrier to youth gang prevention. One key informant noted the *"Darwinian logic of gang violence...it's mostly ethnic gangsters hurting and killing other ethnic gangsters, and as long as some see it this way, investing in prevention will be a hard sell"*. Generally, however, several informants saw issues of race as a barrier from the standpoint of the larger community seeing youth gangs as a problem that communities of

colour had to take leadership on first (*"the average Ottawa citizen may believe they need to own the problem and do their part first"*).

Youth gangs as Ottawa Police Service problem (n=6)

Several key informants noted that many in the community saw the youth gang issue as principally a problem for the Ottawa Police Service to contend with through effective enforcement and suppression. Informants suggested that so long as the majority of the community saw this as a police problem, there would be a low level of community engagement on the issue and therefore a low level of interest in forward-looking prevention investments.

Lack of consensus with respect to scope and dimension of problem (n=6)

Related to the issue of lack of awareness of the youth gang issue, several key informants described that the diversity of opinion with regards to the scope and dimension of the youth gang problem (e.g., ranging from a small problem to a large problem), would represent a barrier to addressing youth gang prevention issues in Ottawa. Until some meaningful consensus was obtained in respect to the approximate scope of the problem, key informants felt it would be difficult to size the appropriate prevention investment.

Fear of community to take action against gangs (n=5)

Because of recent violent gang-related incidents (like home invasions and home takeovers), combined with a perceived growth in gang-related intimidation, several key informers cited that community fear would act as a brake to more widespread prevention. When probed, informants suggested that this fear would manifest itself in several ways including: low level of community volunteerism; lower participation in Neighbourhood Watch programs; fewer Crime Stoppers reports on gang activity and individual participation.

Lack of compelling vision/strategy (n=4)

Notwithstanding the nature of this exercise or the efforts of Crime Prevention Ottawa to gather background information in support of the eventual development of a youth gang prevention strategy, a few key informants spoke of the lack of vision or strategy on the part of the City of Ottawa on this issue.

Perception that working with youth not a "career" (n=4)

Several key informants described the human resource intensive nature of youth gang prevention programs. Availability of quality youth workers was considered a barrier, because of the relatively low levels of pay, high staff turnover and predominant part-time nature of the workforce. Some felt that young people did not see working with at-risk youth a "career", and obtaining staff for expanded prevention efforts may be a challenge. As was noted elsewhere in this report, the lack of continuity in staff was seen to be problematic as youth at-risk ideally require stable, long-term positive influences in their lives.

Lack of commitment or ability to program evaluation (n=3)

Three key informants noted the relative absence of commitment and/or ability (due to insufficient program funding) across the city to formal impact/outcome evaluation of programs, including those targeted to at-risk youth. While informants did not see this as a barrier of doing gang prevention, they saw it as a possible barrier to doing *effective, evidence-based* youth gang prevention.

Lack of coordinated effort**Protectiveness/territoriality of social services agencies****Interagency communication and cooperation (n=3)**

Because of their similarity, the three responses above have been grouped together. Many respondents referred to continued lack of coordinated effort on youth gang issues between the many service providers in the city. *“There are too many silos”* was a common observation, reflecting the belief that some agencies were protective of their turf and funding streams and were not amenable to sharing client data for the broader good. One key informant noted that *“this needs to change, as these are all common clients....we see the same people as YSB, Boys and Girls, and others, so why can’t we better work together?”*. However, many also noted that the spirit of partnership in Ottawa has always been strong, and the striking of a youth gang committee at Crime Prevention Ottawa was considered an excellent step towards ameliorating any real or perceived lack of cooperation on the matter.

Lack of long-term funding commitment for D.A.R.T. (n=2)

Two key informants noted the possible preventative value of the new Ottawa Police Service Direct Action Response Team (DART). However, informants suggested that since the unit has secured funding for only one year, this may represent a barrier to an effective prevention response in Ottawa.

Lack of federal money for prevention in Ottawa (n=2)

Two key informants described as a barrier the National Crime Prevention Centre’s perceived indifference to the Ottawa area from the standpoint of providing funding for gang prevention programs. Specifically, these informants suggested that the NCPC did not look at Ottawa as a problematic gang city and therefore would be funding programs (through their Youth Gang Prevention Fund) elsewhere, at the expense of Ottawa’s growing gang issue.

Tenant protection legislation (n=1)

One key informant described the difficulties with which the Ottawa Housing Corporation had to contend with to evict troublesome tenants, including those known in the community to be gang involved and/or using their apartment to conduct gang-related business. The existence of these negative community influences, the key informant contended, would short-circuit the effectiveness of any gang prevention efforts in those same communities.

Problem sits with voluntary sector (n=1)

One key informant described as a barrier that the youth gang situation sits with the voluntary sector rather than the broader community. While the informant believed that the voluntary sector was

handling the situation *“as best as it could given limited resources, the numbers have unfortunately grown”*. For this individual, youth gang prevention efforts would be hampered until there was broader community engagement including political leadership, the corporate community and average citizens.

Results From Gang Member Interviews

A total of five former and/or existing gang members were interviewed via telephone for this project sourced through referrals and personal contacts. The principal objective of these interviews was to attempt to understand why they involved themselves in gangs in the first place and what might have steered them away from joining, which perhaps may help inform a prevention response for Ottawa. A summary of feedback follows, with specific quotations noted in italicized text:

1. *“At 15 I moved into a new neighbourhood where there wasn’t much to do, no friends, and I got beat up on the first day. Then again on the second, the third and so on. Got beat up everyday for about 10 days, then the Ledbury-Banff Crips offered me protection if I joined. So I joined – it was an easy decision, and I got left alone after that”*. Youth described that he was at a fight and his buddy was shot and killed. Later, his house got burned down when he was supposed to be there so his family decided to move away to a different part of town. As to why he left the gang, the combination of the move and the help he got from an adult who took the time to get to know him and set me straight . *“I just needed someone in my life to talk to about what was going on and the challenges I was facing. I also needed to get involved in organized sports, for me basketball, which kept me off the streets”*. Youth said he was 18 when he left and the gang left me alone after that. Asked what could have prevented him from joining the gang in the first place, the youth responded *“Not much! If you live in a bad neighbourhood, you are screwed! I know now that gangs are a bad thing, but I wish I knew that earlier before I joined, but like I said, I didn’t have much of a choice. Maybe if I had someone then to talk about my problems I would have been OK”*
2. Sixteen year old youth described that his older brother was involved in a small gang so he always remembered being in and around gang members, *“although I didn’t think of them as gangsters just the guys in the ‘hood”* ; youth at 14 became involved to assist brother in holding/hiding drugs at school and doing some trading. Became a full member of a Blood gang set one year later. Described that there were a lot of kids in the community involved or around the edges of the gang. Joining gave him a sense of power and belonging. *“In my neighbourhood, people give you respect when you’re in the gang. They know who you are, they know who my friends are, and they don’t mess”*. Youth described himself as still gang involved, *“but not hardcore or anything ‘cuz I really don’t like hurting people....still in it for the cash, girls, and they way it make me feel - important”*. With respect to what could have prevented his involvement, youth indicated *“probably not much, my brother was a big influence in my life so I followed him in....it just seemed the natural thing to do”*.

3. Seventeen year old youth described that there were a lot of kids in the neighbourhood who thought the gang was “cool” because of the way they acted, dressed and spoke. He said the gang “*controlled the streets, ran the place*”, and he was attracted to the sense of power and “team spirit”. Youth said that there wasn’t a lot for him to do, so gang activity “*just helped me fill the time and make some money . It was off and on violence – saw shootings, some stabbings, lots of fighting just for the fun of it, like it was a sport or something. I felt powerful in the gang, an untouchable. Sold a lot of drugs and we were into selling girls as well. I did pretty good in the gang and eventually I had my own 7-person crew. LBC members always ran in packs of 7.*” He also indicated that it was risky to not be part “*of some crew*”, otherwise you’d get “*punked and robbed all the time*”. Generally, the youth said there was not one reason in particular that he joined, but several. As far as preventing his involvement in the first place, the youth noted that a safer, better police-patrolled community would have helped to keep the gang less visible and active. He also mentioned that more sports, recreation and community centre time would have helped, as well as a tutoring program because he was struggling in school.
4. A 19 year old youth spoke in terms of social support and the sense of companionship he got from his gang as the reason he joined. “*All of the guys in my gang, we are all from the same project, the same neighbourhood. We all grew up together, so we are like family now. We respect each other, we take care of each other. No one else seems to want to help us, so we take care of ourselves, making money, watching each other’s back. We are like family, man*”. Asked what would have kept him from joining a gang, this youth simply said “*growing up in a different neighbourhood, maybe, with lots more to do...*”.
5. The final interviewee described his reasons for joining a gang because of the opportunity to earn money through the drug trade. “*I got involved to make some cash because I was poor. I didn’t have any other opportunities to make money and I couldn’t even get a part time job at McDonalds. I wanted money for clothes, some drugs and the clubs, and some money for my mother*”. This young person also mentioned other factors, like “*there’s safety in numbers, few adults that care about us Blacks, it really matters where your grow up in Ottawa*”. From a prevention perspective, he noted the following things may have helped in his case: having a dad around, more opportunities for sports right in his community, more part-time job opportunities, music/video education opportunities (e.g., he wanted to learn how to record rap videos and songs), better programs and staff at the community house, a local drop-in centre to hang out with friends.

Discussion and Recommendations

The purpose of this research project was to briefly summarize the youth gang situation in Ottawa, discuss what key informant interviewees highlighted is needed to address the current situation as well as note the gaps in service delivery in the region. Throughout the research protocol, we had excellent participation from key informants, and we believe the information contained within this report will assist the CPO in furthering their youth gang prevention agenda.

On the matter of the state of youth gangs in Ottawa, the diversity in response (ranging from it's overblown to one of the most pressing crime problems in city) suggests a lack of consensus as to the scope and dimension of the youth gang issue. While it should be said that many key informants described the youth gang problem as growing but not out of control, if CPO can facilitate a process to gather better statistical information on the state of youth gangs and then identify a more common perspective across key stakeholders, this may greatly assist in the formulation of a balanced and supported prevention strategy.

The link between youth gangs and specific neighbourhoods was demonstrated through the survey, the key informant interviews and gang member interviews. The communities most associated with youth and street gang behaviour are well-known to key informants and often described as the "usual suspects". The link also between some of the communities and the Ottawa Community Housing Corporation was also demonstrated, which suggests their enhanced presence at the CPO's working group on gangs is indeed worthwhile.

With respect to why youth join gangs, key informants demonstrated an excellent understanding of the many risk factors associated with gang affiliation, which were supported by many of the comments made by gang members as to why they joined gangs in the first place. The wide variety of reasons cited (15 in total) reinforces the fact that youth gangs are a complex social organism and that prevention programs, if they are to be effective, must address a number of risk factors acting upon youth.

In aggregate across this diverse group of key informants, there is a great deal of consensus that larger prevention investments must be made to address the youth gang situation in Ottawa. Ottawa Police Service-led suppression and enforcement is seen as an important tool in addressing the violence and other negative impacts associated with youth and street gangs activity, and several informants are appreciative of the work of the OPS in this regard. However, until a larger, and some have said "meaningful", investment is made in prevention programming, especially programs targeted to younger at-risk youth, the youth gang problem will continue to increase in scope and severity in Ottawa. On the matter of specific program and service ideas deemed effective, key informants expressed a wide range of ideas, many of which also represent gaps in service delivery in Ottawa.

There is also a high degree of consensus that one of Ottawa's "gifts" is the collegial relationships among and between social service agencies and other stakeholders who work with at-risk youth, youth gangs and related matters. Several informants noted that Ottawa is still a "small city" and the relationships that have been cultivated over the years – between groups like the City of Ottawa, Ottawa Police Service, Youth Services Bureau, Children's Aid Society, Boys and Girls Club, and Roberts Smart Centre, among many others – will support Crime Prevention Ottawa's goal to craft, coordinate or influence a long term and effective youth gang prevention strategy. Having said this, we would be remiss if we didn't reiterate the concern that many feel there are still "too many silos" in the City and "too much overlap" in service delivery. These things, and the natural protectiveness of agencies for their budgets, span of influence and programs and services, may effectively act as a brake to the collaboration and cooperation needed for a unified youth gang prevention approach for the Ottawa region. At the same time, a key challenge all front line agencies face, and likely Crime Prevention Ottawa as well, is that of funding. Good prevention costs money and generally renders results slowly through time, so CPO's ability to build a strong "business case" in support of additional resources, even with a vibrant and engaged community-based committee behind it, is paramount.

On this matter, we would refer you to the Edmonton based group, The Community Solution to Gang Violence (CSGV). CSGV is an initiative comprised of a diverse group of individuals, including private citizens, community organizations and all levels of government, who work collaboratively on a strategic, community-wide approach to address the issue of gangs and gang violence. Established in 2003 and composed of a main steering committee and four working groups (dealing with community awareness, early intervention, youth (supportive programs) and government and policy, respectively), the organization operates on a \$250,000 per year budget, pieced together from a number of sources including government grants, foundation donations and other fund development activities. Despite the value and uniqueness of the organization, the breadth of community support it receives and their several meaningful achievements to date, the organization is struggling financially and its long-term future is anything but assured. According to the author's recent conversation with its program manager, these uncertainties may threaten the collaborative partnerships that have been developed as members may lose confidence in the long term viability of the organization.

We reference the CSGV case simply as a cautionary tale. Like Ottawa, Edmonton has witnessed a rise in gang activity, although theirs is concentrated in the young Aboriginal community. With a gang problem similar in size, community concern is high in both cities and leaders have stepped forward in the spirit of collaboration to attempt to address it in a preventative fashion. However, the best laid plans can sometimes be rendered insignificant if they are not properly resourced, and we believe it is essential for Crime Prevention Ottawa, or whomever may lead this initiative to the next step, to critically assess different funding models and their ability to support meaningful youth gang prevention efforts.

We should note that as an adjunct question, we asked a selection of key informants "what role should Crime Prevention Ottawa play in youth gang prevention?". With CPO's present broad mandate including

advocacy, planning, evaluation, program implementation, partnership development and granting with respect to community crime prevention programs generally, CPO is considered a body that logically has a role to play in youth gang prevention as well. The majority of informants noted that CPO's role in this regard should largely be one of a coordination and support function, that is, identifying and promoting best practices, facilitating partnerships, working to identify and reduce program duplication, evaluating specific gang prevention programs and sharing results, and generally, ensuring a plan is created, monitored and amended through time with a high degree of community feedback. The notion of youth gang prevention information "clearinghouse" was noted several times, and informants spoke of the need for CPO to have a close relationship with the Ottawa Police Service with respect to gang prevention, given the work OPS is already doing in this regard. As to whether CPO has a fund development and granting function in respect to specific gang prevention programs, informants noted, was essentially dependent on the City's willingness to act on youth gang prevention and its budgetary constraints. As a general proposition, key informants did not express a high degree of confidence that the City in the short term would allocate additional monies to CPO for specific gang prevention programming. This suggests that money for youth gang prevention may need to come from elsewhere, including provincial and federal sources. Perhaps here CPO may have a role in crafting proposals and seeking funding for prevention programs than span the city (e.g., such as an integrated, community wide prevention campaign).

Our assessment is that Crime Prevention Ottawa has done an excellent job to date bringing key people to the table to deal with youth gang prevention issues. CPO, and its youth gangs working group, is one of only a handful of initiatives across the country where communities are banding together to address gang prevention in a focused and thoughtful fashion. Going forward, as Crime Prevention Ottawa continues to research and determine its approach to youth gangs, we offer the following recommendations for consideration:

1. We recommend that Crime Prevention Ottawa attempt to expand the membership of the youth gang committee to include representation from youth, the business community, faith communities and others (see page 28, under *Multi-Stakeholder Involvement*). In particular, active representation from the Ottawa Community Housing Corporation would be advantageous, and they have indeed expressed this desire. These additions will broaden the voice of the committee and ensure an even greater diversity of ideas are considered.
2. We recommend that the Youth Gang Committee create a new "prevention strategy development" subcommittee of perhaps 6 to 8 appointees, with a specific terms of reference to move the development of a strategy forward to the next stage. In addition, if it does not already exist, a specific terms of reference should be crafted and disseminated to the overall working group as well, to ensure clarity in direction and focus.
3. Concurrent with number 3 above, we recommend that Crime Prevention Ottawa team up with the Ottawa Police Service to identify the youth gang and street gang "hotspots" in the City through analysis of crime data, call for service data, Crimestoppers information, police intelligence and other information sources. This information may also be augmented with data

from other sources, including City of Ottawa Parks and Recreation, OC Transpo incident reports, school board incident data, etc. This information will assist in identifying the communities that are truly most at-risk and therefore assist in better targeting of resources. As well, this analysis may assist in computing a true size of the youth gang membership in Ottawa, which will facilitate the gaining of consensus in regards to the actual scope and dimension of the youth gang problem.

4. Since many key informants spoke of the duplication in services in Ottawa, we recommend that Crime Prevention Ottawa or another group conduct an inventory of program assets (type of program, objectives, format, location, costs, capacity, etc.) in the so-called “hot-spots” identified in item number 3 above. Such an inventory will allow CPO to map program assets to trouble spots, and therefore target prevention efforts more wisely in those areas with more acute youth gang problems. As an example, Crime Prevention Ottawa may wish to utilize a similar approach to that employed by Edmonton’s CSGV, where they created an on-line gang prevention program matrix, “designed to gather information on agencies, programs, services and best practices that build protective factors around children and young people that enable them to resist gang involvement and that promote positive healthy development”. As well, from the Crime Prevention Ottawa website, consideration ought to be given to linking directly with the Ottawa Youth Justice Services website which also contains program information and ideas. In this way, the CPO web site grows to become a valuable “portal” of information on youth crime prevention.
5. In addition to creating an inventory of local program assets, we recommend that Crime Prevention Ottawa undertake research to identify best and promising practices in youth gang prevention from Canada, the United States and elsewhere. This information should likewise be posted on-line.
6. Once these data assets are in place, and upon the formation of the Prevention Strategy Development subcommittee, we recommend that Crime Prevention Ottawa invest in a one-day facilitated planning session to discuss the framework of a youth gang prevention strategy. The objectives of the planning session process would be to create a Balanced Scorecard and strategy map, which would be followed by the authorship of a 10 to 20 page discussion document outlining, in broad strokes, the possible shape of a youth gang prevention approach (strategies, tactics, resources, responsibilities, participants, etc.). This documents could then be presented to the overall youth gang working group for discussion and debate, then iterated at the youth gang committee level until a foundation of consensus is developed in regards to the shape of a youth gang prevention strategy for the City of Ottawa.
7. Results from the on-line survey indicate that lack of awareness of the youth gang issue is of concern to respondents – education for themselves, parents and other front-line service providers. To that end, we recommend that CPO conduct a training needs assessment of front line service providers. This would consist of a brief survey asking respondents to identify which subject matters pertaining to gangs they are most interested in learning about (e.g., state of gangs in region, youth gang characteristics, mentality of gangs, gang communication, signs of gang involvement, school safety, personal safety, dealing with gang members, prevention best

practices, etc.). Input from this will assist in creating an agenda for a one-day youth gang conference with invited guest speakers, which CPO may wish to organize and offer to the community in the Spring of 2008. Such a forum may assist in generating more profile for the issue as well as the work of the CPO, and reinforce its position as a leader in youth gang prevention. In addition, on the evening of the same day of the gang conference, consideration should also be given to hosting a “community town hall” (perhaps with CBC Radio), where parents, caregivers and concerned community citizens can express their concerns and issues in respect to youth gangs.

8. Despite the across the board commitment to youth gang prevention, an overwhelming concern expressed was the ability for key stakeholders to finance such activities. Indeed, a youth gang prevention planning process must taken into account available resources, so we also recommend that a small task force (perhaps composed of select membership from the youth gang working group), begin the process of identifying possible sources of prevention/intervention program money. These sources could include federal, provincial and municipal funding streams, charitable foundations, private and publicly traded corporations, police agencies, local philanthropists, etc. Scoping the possible size of investment pool for youth gang prevention is key to crafting an achievable plan into 2008 and beyond.

Section 7

For More Information

Please direct your questions or comments to:

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Appendix A

Survey Instrument

November 19, 2007

Dear Sir/Madam:

Crime Prevention Ottawa (CPO), in collaboration with a multi-stakeholder working group on youth gangs, has retained our firm to assess the youth gang situation in Ottawa. As part of this assessment, we are gathering opinion in respect to how the community can respond to youth gangs and youth gang members.

You have been identified as a person whom may have valuable input to share with us. We therefore respectfully request a small amount of your time to participate in this important process, which will culminate in a report to be released by CPO in January 2008.

Specifically, we ask for an initial time commitment of approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete the attached confidential on-line survey. This survey lists a total of 35 statements describing various issues related to the Ottawa youth gang situation. We kindly ask you to indicate, in the space provided, the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statement.

These survey results will allow us to identify themes for further examination, which will occur through a process of key informant interviews during the week of December 3. We may call upon you again to participate in these interviews, which can be scheduled in person or over the phone at your convenience.

We please request that you complete the survey no later than **November 28, 2007**, which can be found at <http://www.surveymonkey.com/astwood/CPO>. Alternatively, if you would prefer to complete the survey on paper or over the phone, or if you have questions or comments, please drop me a line via email and I will get back to you within 24 hours.

Thank you very much in advance for your kind engagement in this assessment. We believe your opinion, along with that of others, will help CPO and its partners reduce crime and enhance community safety for the people of Ottawa.

Sincerely,

Michael Chettleburgh

President and Director of Research
Astwood Strategy Corporation

Crime Prevention Ottawa – Youth Gang Report

The purpose of this survey form is to gather your preliminary thoughts on the state of youth gangs in Ottawa, what can be done to address the situation, and what gaps in service delivery you believe exist. We kindly ask that you complete the survey as completely as possible by **November 28, 2007**.

For the purposes of this survey, we offer the following definition of “youth gang”: **a self-formed group of 3 or more youth, with a common identity, who are under the age of 19 and involved in anti-social and/or criminal activities.”**

# INSTRUCTIONS: Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with each of the following statements by placing a check mark in the appropriate box.		Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
1	I have good knowledge of the youth gang situation in Ottawa.						
2	As a community, we have adequate services to address youth gangs in Ottawa.						
3	There is sufficient money available in Ottawa to respond to youth gangs.						
4	To respond to youth gangs, we need a broader police suppression response.						
5	To respond to youth gangs, we need a broader prevention response.						
6	To respond to youth gangs, we need a broader diversion and intervention response.						
7	There are sufficient prevention and early intervention programs in place in Ottawa for youth at-risk of gang involvement.						
8	There is sufficient political willingness to address the root causes of gang formation in Ottawa.						
9	There are sufficient community-based diversion programs in place in Ottawa to deal with youth who have involved themselves in youth gang related crimes or anti-social behavior.						
10	The Ottawa Police Service is well prepared to deal with the youth gang situation from an intervention, diversion, investigation and suppression perspective.						
11	There are sufficient programs in place in Ottawa for post-incarcerated youth (re-integration programs).						
12	In Ottawa, we do a good job educating youth about the dangers of youth gangs and gang violence.						
13	The youth gang issue in Ottawa is largely driven by socioeconomic conditions.						
14	The youth gang issue in Ottawa is largely driven by the illicit drug trade and other criminal markets.						
15	The youth gang issue in Ottawa is largely driven by location (neighbourhoods).						
16	The youth gang issue in Ottawa is largely driven by lack of family connection.						
17	The youth gang issue in Ottawa is largely driven by lack of school success.						
18	Schools and educators are well equipped and prepared to deal with youth gangs and youth gang members.						

19	Parents/caregivers of Ottawa youth have a good level of awareness about youth gang issues.						
20	Our custody facilities are effective at reforming and rehabilitating youth involved with gang related or other crimes.						
21	There is a high degree of collaboration and commitment among Ottawa community agencies/partners with respect to dealing with the youth gang issue.						
22	There is a high degree of inter-agency communication in Ottawa with respect to youth gang issues, incidents, problems and opportunities.						
23	Confidentiality concerns are a barrier to inter-agency collaboration and communication.						
24	The social service sector and youth serving agencies in Ottawa have sufficient capacity (physical, financial and human resources) to meet the challenges posed by youth gangs.						
25	The community sees the youth gang issue as one with which the Ottawa Police and other criminal justice system actors must principally contend.						
26	There are sufficient after school programs for young people.						
27	I believe gang exit programs may be effective in helping youth leave gangs without serious repercussion.						
28	Front line service providers in Ottawa require training on youth gang issues.						
29	Myself and/or my organization has adequate knowledge of the risk and protective factors underlying gang affiliation.						
30	Myself and/or my organization has adequate knowledge of international best practices in youth gang prevention.						
31	We can learn a lot about the youth gang situation by talking to gang affiliated youth.						
32	The following programs and services are useful in preventing gang involvement:						
a.	Enhanced English as a second language (ESL) training						
b.	Organized after-school sports, recreation and leisure activities						
c.	Supervised homework clubs						
d.	Life skills development programs						
e.	Group/one on one counseling for conduct disordered youth						
f.	Career or job training						
g.	Programs to create stronger bonds between children and parents						
h.	Long-term mentoring programs						
i.	Alternative school programs						
j.	Programs to address early identified aggressive children						

Appendix B

List of Key Informants

Educators

1. Thomas D'Amico, Principal, Immaculata High School
2. Jonathan Crosier, Principal, McHugh Education Centre
3. Dan Wiseman, Manager, Safe Schools, OCDSB
4. Frank Wiley, Principal, Canterbury High School
5. Jean-François Thibodeau, Conseiller pédagogique, Volet pédagogique-palier secondaire, CEPEO
6. Marc Lafleur, Vice Principal, Ridgemont High School

Law Enforcement and Other Criminal Justice

7. Staff Sergeant Michael Callaghan, Youth and Guns and Gangs Unit, Ottawa Police Service
8. Louise Logue, Youth Intervention and Diversion Coordinator, Ottawa Police Service
9. Sergeant Mark Houldsworth, Youth Unit, Ottawa Police Service
10. Jack Woods, School Resource Officer, Ottawa Police Service
11. Inspector John Gardiner, Ottawa Police Service
12. Cpl Pat Poitevin, Royal Canadian Mounted Police

Social Service and Community

13. Scott Bradford, Executive Director, Boys and Girls Club
14. James Tanguay, Britannia Clubhouse Manager, Ottawa Boys and Girls Club
15. Tom Patrick, Director, Camp Smitty, Ottawa Boys and Girls Club
16. Guy Dagenais, Executive Director, Eastern Ontario Youth Justice Agency
17. Wali Farah, Program Manager, Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization
18. Cameron Macleod, Executive Director, Roberts Smart Centre
19. Mike Noel, Coordinator, William Hay Centre
20. Mark Routliffe, Director – A Different Street Housing Program, John Howard Society of Ottawa
21. Mark Totten, Director of Research, Youth Services Bureau
22. Jacquie Woodward, Director, Child and Youth in Care Services, Children's Aid Society of Ottawa
23. Darryl Diamond, Extrajudicial Measures Program Manager, Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health
24. Carlie Chase, Programs Manager, Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health
25. Beth Gibeault, Executive Director, Britannia Woods Community House
26. Shoon Omar, Community Developer, Lowertown Resource Centre
27. Desiree Rapoch, Child and Youth Community Developer, Somerset West CHC
28. Abdi Hilawi, Youth Worker, Ridgemont High School
29. Gail Steeds, Alternatives to Custody Specialist, Ministry of Children and Youth Services Youth Justice Services
30. Jo-Anne Poirier, CEO, Ottawa Community Housing Corporation
31. Jean Dube, Manager, Community Safety Services, Ottawa Community Housing Corporation
32. Bernie Burns, Director of Community and Program Development, Ottawa Community Housing Corporation

Citizens and Others

33. Geoffrey Sharpe, Ad hoc Committee on Community Safety, Ward 7 (Pinecrest)