



GANG COURTS: AN INNOVATIVE STRATEGY FOR GANG-INVOLVED OFFENDERS 2014



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FOREWORD

Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) is a nationwide commitment to reduce gun and gang crime in America by networking existing local programs that target gun crime and gang involvement, and providing these programs with additional tools necessary to be successful. Since its inception in 2001, approximately \$2 billion has been committed to this initiative.

Since 2003, Community Corrections Institute (CCI) has been involved in PSN and has provided PSN training and technical assistance to community corrections agencies and staff nationwide. CCI continues to provide technical assistance, resources, instruction, and tactical training to assist community corrections agencies in implementing and enhancing proactive supervision and reentry strategies for gang offenders currently under criminal justice sentence in urban, rural, and tribal communities.

While many jurisdictions have developed drug courts, mental health courts, and veteran's courts, virtually no jurisdictions have developed gang courts. This publication examines two such courts.

The first program reviewed was developed by the U.S. Probation Office for the Eastern District of Missouri, headquartered in St. Louis, Missouri. This program titled "The St. Louis Gang Reentry Initiative Project" (GRIP) focuses on adult federal offenders and has specific criteria for admittance into the program. The majority of participants in the GRIP program are adult African-American males with documented gang affiliation. Most of the program participants have served some form of incarceration prior to entering the program.

The second court program reviewed is the Yakima County Gang Court (YGC), located in Yakima, Washington. The YGC program was developed for gang-involved juveniles. The Yakima, Washington area has a significant Hispanic population and has experienced an influx of Hispanic gang members.

This report examines the structure of both programs, provides information regarding the development of each program, and provides information from statistical research conducted for both programs plus interviews with the various participants of each program. Those interviewed provide candid information about what they see as the strengths of the programs and the areas that have proven to be problematic in both the development and continued function of the gang court projects.

Through careful review of each program, it is the authors' goal to provide information on both the development and sustained function of both programs and to give any jurisdiction considering development of a gang court the opportunity to learn from each gang court experience.

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Gang Courts: An Innovative Strategy for Gang-Involved Offenders

INTRODUCTION

According to the 2011 National Youth Gang Survey,¹ there are an estimated 29,000 street gangs and 782,500 street gang members active in 3,300 jurisdictions around the United States (Egley and Howell, 2013). The 2011 National Gang Threat Assessment, which includes outlaw motorcycle gangs and prison gangs, estimates there are 1.4 million individuals involved in all three types of gangs in the United States (National Gang Intelligence Center, 2011). While violent crime in the United States has decreased to the lowest point since the late 1970s, gang-related homicides increased by 5 percent between 2002 and 2011, and gang members are estimated to have committed 3,844 homicides during 2010 and 2011 (Egley and Howell, 2013).

Gangs continue to have a serious effect on communities around the United States. Research has shown that gang members are more likely than the overall criminal population to engage in crime and violence, increasing their risk of being involved in a violent incident and experiencing violence-related injuries (Egley, Logan, and McDaniel, 2012). Gang membership also appears to increase an individual's likelihood of committing a delinquent or criminal offense and increases the rate at which these individuals offend.

One study conducted with sixth through ninth graders found that “the onset of gang membership was associated with an **82 percent increase in delinquency frequency**” (Melde and Esbensen, 2011, p. 535, emphasis added). Longitudinal studies conducted in Rochester, New York, and Denver, Colorado, also found that gang-involved youth offended at a rate that was significantly higher than for other youth:

Gang membership had a tremendous impact on the lives of these youth. [Rochester] gang members—both male and female—accounted for the lion's share of all delinquency. Although gang members were only 30 percent of the studied population, they were involved in 63 percent of all delinquent acts (excluding gang fights), 82 percent of serious delinquencies, 70 percent of drug sales, and 54 percent of all arrests . . . [Denver] gang members accounted for approximately 80 percent of all serious and violent crime (excluding gang fights) committed by the sample. Further, over a 5-year period, these individuals committed the vast majority of crimes while they were gang members (e.g., 85 percent

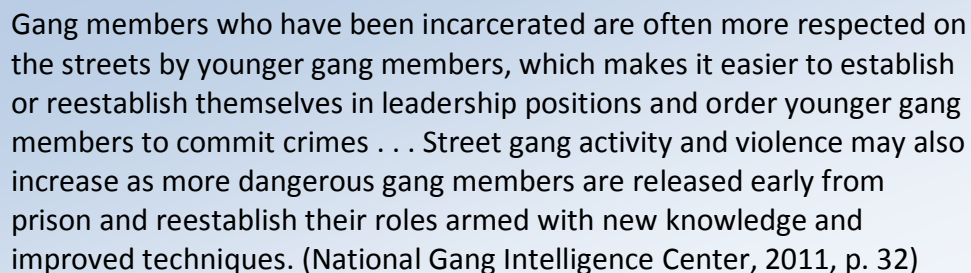
¹ <http://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/survey-analysis/>

of their serious violent offenses, 86 percent of their serious property offenses, and 80 percent of their drug sale offenses). The social processes of being an active gang member clearly facilitate or enhance involvement in delinquent behavior. (Thornberry, Huizinga, and Loeber, 2004, pp. 8–9)

Long-term gang affiliation increases the likelihood of more serious involvement in the criminal justice system, as well as involvement in gangs within the correctional setting. The National Gang Threat Assessment notes:

Once incarcerated, most street gang members join an established prison gang to ensure their protection. Based on data provided by federal and state correctional agencies, the NGIC estimates that there are approximately 230,000 gang members incarcerated in federal and state prisons nationwide. Their large numbers and dominant presence allows prison gangs to employ bribery, intimidation, and violence to exert influence and control over many correctional facilities. Violent disputes over control of drug territory and enforcement of drug debts frequently occur among incarcerated gang members. (National Gang Intelligence Center, 2011, p. 30)

Upon release, the gang-involved offenders often resume their participation with criminal street gang activity:



Gang members who have been incarcerated are often more respected on the streets by younger gang members, which makes it easier to establish or reestablish themselves in leadership positions and order younger gang members to commit crimes . . . Street gang activity and violence may also increase as more dangerous gang members are released early from prison and reestablish their roles armed with new knowledge and improved techniques. (National Gang Intelligence Center, 2011, p. 32)

A study conducted with adult offenders in Missouri showed that gang-involved offenders were twice as likely (56 percent) as non-gang-involved offenders (28 percent) to recidivate following release from incarceration (Huebner, Varano, and Bynum, 2007). The long-term and detrimental effects of gangs, both on individuals and the community, make a strong argument for gang interventions within court systems, beginning in the juvenile court system and extending through the adult court system, including post-release supervision of gang-involved offenders.

Recently, criminal justice systems in St. Louis, Missouri, and Yakima, Washington, have responded by creating court-based gang intervention programs. These programs are

based on the drug court model and provide gang-involved juvenile and adult offenders with appropriate support and opportunities while seeking to protect the community and reduce recidivism. While neither program has been rigorously evaluated, both appear to be innovative and promising approaches to reducing gang members' involvement in violent crime. This article provides an overview of the key elements of each program and lessons learned during its implementation.

The St. Louis Gang Reentry Initiative Project (GRIP)

St. Louis is a large metropolitan community located on the banks of the Mississippi River in eastern Missouri. While the population of the city of St. Louis is approximately 318,000, the St. Louis metropolitan area boasts a population of 2.9 million and is home to almost half of the population of the entire state of Missouri (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). In 2012, *Business Insider* ranked St. Louis as the third most dangerous city in the United States, based on the city's reported 1,857 violent crimes per 100,000 people ("The 25 most dangerous," 2012).

The National Gang Threat Assessment notes the presence of 490 gangs in Missouri, many of which are active in the St. Louis metropolitan area (National Gang Intelligence Center, 2011). Gang affiliation and gang-influenced criminal offending play a significant role in the population supervised by the U.S. Probation Office for the Eastern District of Missouri (St. Louis). The Eastern District of Missouri's offender population ranks first in likelihood of reoffending out of the 94 federal judicial districts nationwide (Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts, DSS Report, 2013).

In 2010, the U.S. Probation Office in St. Louis researched the demographics, gang involvement, and recidivism rates of the offenders it supervises. The research found that, for the years between 2004 and 2008, 305 African-American males had their supervision status revoked. Fifty-one percent (155) of the revoked probationers were identified as gang members or gang-involved, and the criminal conduct leading to the revocation of probation involved new criminal activity, including violent crimes (Nicholson, personal correspondence, 2013).

Based on these findings, the U.S. Probation Office in St. Louis initiated the Gang Reentry Initiative Project (GRIP), a voluntary intensive supervision program, in August 2010. The goal of the GRIP program is to assist gang-involved offenders by using a comprehensive approach to connect individuals under supervision with resources, training and education that will enhance their ability to successfully function within the community; to reduce violent crimes committed by these probationers; and to aid them in successfully completing supervision.

GRIP Program Structure

GRIP's program structure includes a U.S. District Court judge, an Assistant U.S. Attorney (AUSA), an Assistant Federal Public Defender (AFPD), a team of U.S. Probation Officers, treatment providers and community partners. GRIP partners emphasize the importance of having consistent participation by agency personnel who are committed to the program and dedicated to assisting gang-involved offenders.

Probation Officers

The GRIP probation team includes four probation officers, managed by a supervising probation officer. While the supervisor was highly involved in the creation of the GRIP program and maintains oversight of the program, the probation officers are responsible for the majority of the daily work of the team. Two officers on the team manage specialized caseloads of gang-involved offenders. Based on the individual needs of each probationer, the team's probation officers make treatment and community resource referrals and have contact with participants at least four times per month. On a biweekly basis, the probation officers prepare program progress reports for the team on the status of the GRIP participants. When serious problems arise with a case, the probation officers work with the judge, AFPB, and AUSA to immediately address the participant's issues.

Each of the team members has a background in working with gang-involved populations:

- Probation Officer Mike Nicholson previously worked for the St. Louis Police Department for 10 years and was assigned for 5 years to the Gang Unit, where he was instrumental in creating a gang intelligence database. He emphasized the importance of program personnel having knowledge of gangs in the local community, familiarity with the "shot callers" in local gangs, and the ability to communicate well with gang-involved offenders and to determine the truthfulness of their statements (Nicholson, interview, 2012).
- Probation Officer Jennifer Siwiecki has worked in this role for 4 years and previously worked as a state probation officer for 5 years, where she supervised many gang-involved offenders. She noted that state probation caseloads often exceed 100 clients, which is difficult to manage (Siwiecki, interview, 2012).
- Probation Officer Jennifer Parker is a mental health specialist and is working on her doctorate. She was added to the team to provide support for mental health issues, which the team has found to be a significant problem for many GRIP participants. She works closely with service

providers in the community, helps to assess participants' mental health issues, and recommends effective methods of treatment.

- U.S. Probation Officer Mike Schmidt collects statistical data on client outcomes and program activities and coordinates programming and funding through community resources. He noted that it's important to maintain a database that includes information on offenders' gang affiliations and involvement. Using this information, officers can track links between gang-involved offenders and access up-to-date information on probationers' gang affiliations and gang involvement by their family members. He also states that collection of this gang information is helpful to probation officers who may be unaware that they are supervising offenders with gang affiliations, which can cause issues for case management and pose a safety risk for the probation officers (Schmidt, interview, 2012).

In the GRIP program, each probation team member supervises a caseload of approximately 38 probationers. The reduced size of these caseloads is essential to the success of the program and allows the officers to provide intense supervision to participants and to maintain regular communication with service providers.

The AUSA

A designated AUSA is assigned to the GRIP team and plays a unique role in the program. He encourages participants to succeed in the program and participates in individual case-planning meetings. He also provides input on sanctions, revocation, and new prosecutions, if necessary. The AUSA's involvement in the GRIP team has allowed the program to achieve a balance between legal accountability and responsiveness to individual client circumstances. In some instances, participants with a previous history of crime and violence have improved their behavior substantially but have still incurred minor technical violations of supervision. The AUSA has been able to see these participants' decreased offending as progress and to respond in a flexible way to the technical violations. AUSA Thomas Rea notes that he believes the program is "a terrific idea" and commended the probation officers for "dealing with a group that is the worst of the worst" (Rea, interview, 2012).

The AFD

The role played by the AFD in the GRIP team is also unique. Unlike the AFD's standard role in often adversarial proceedings, where the goal is to defend the client from criminal charges and possible sanctions, the AFD's role in the GRIP program continues long after the court proceedings end. Like the AUSA, the AFD is involved in all decisions relating to participant case planning. The AFD encourages program participation and compliance by offenders and intervenes as needed to address any noncompliance by participants in the GRIP program. The AFD's goal in the GRIP team is to facilitate and support the client's long-term success. If new violations occur, the

AFPD works directly with the probation officers and AUSA to make recommendations to the judge that are in the best interests of the client. The AFPD's involvement in the GRIP program requires continued contact with the clients and, in many cases, continued time and effort to address old and new legal issues for these clients as they arise.

The Judge

Judge Henry E. Autrey, who presides in the U.S. District Court in the Eastern District of Missouri, handles the cases of all of the offenders involved in the GRIP program. Upon acceptance into the program, the participant's case is transferred to Judge Autrey's docket, even if a case was originally assigned to a different judge. The judge's active and consistent involvement with GRIP participants is considered essential to the program (U.S. Probation Office, Eastern District of Missouri, 2010). The judge provides encouragement for participants who are doing well and, when needed, provides sanctions for noncompliance. These sanctions are based on recommendations of the team and the severity of the noncompliance. If the team determines that a participant has exhausted his or her opportunities with the program, the team will make a recommendation to the judge to start the revocation process. Like the other partners in the GRIP program, Judge Autrey believes in the effectiveness of the GRIP program and notes that it provides opportunities to offenders who might otherwise be seen as hopeless (Autrey, interview, 2012).



All of the GRIP partners emphasized that the effective functioning of the program is dependent on agency personnel, regardless of role, working together, communicating openly, and sharing common goals.

GRIP Program Evaluation and Admission

GRIP participants are screened by the Gang Unit probation officers prior to admission to the program, and this assessment is reviewed by program partners. This screening is generally conducted when the probationer arrives at a halfway house following release from custody. The probation officers indicate that participants are less successful in the program if they have already been released into the community. Participants must be validated as gang members using law enforcement or corrections criteria and must admit to gang membership. Non-validated gang members and associates can participate if they acknowledge their gang membership, and this membership is then verified by the GRIP probation officers. The AUSA noted that the team does not intentionally choose low-level offenders but generally selects offenders with a serious history of criminal involvement.

Participants must meet the following criteria (“Gang reentry initiative,” 2010):

- Arrested for or convicted of violent crimes, including murder, manslaughter, serious assaults, and/or firearms-related offenses
- A Risk Prediction Index (RPI) score of 7 or higher (9 is the highest score on the RPI)
- At least 18 months remaining on a term of U.S. probation supervision
- No current serious substance abuse issues, though a history of substance abuse is acceptable
- No serious mental health issues
- Signed agreement to all requirements and stipulations of the program
- Not the subject of ongoing investigations or pending indictments

Before enrolling in the program, participants are required to observe a session of gang court. If they still wish to enroll in the program, they are asked to sign a participant agreement and submit to a urinalysis test. Once enrolled, participants are required to remain in the program for the duration, unless terminated by the team for noncompliance. If a participant withdraws from the program without permission from the team, this withdrawal may be deemed a violation of supervision requirements, and appropriate consequences, including possible revocation of supervision, will be enforced. If the offender has been informed of these requirements and chooses not to sign the agreement, traditional supervision resumes with no negative consequences. In some limited cases, if a participant wishes to withdraw from the program and is in good standing with program requirements, the team can grant approval for the participant to exit without penalty (“Gang reentry initiative,” 2010).

If the participant leaves the program as a result of a revocation, he or she can be reevaluated for re-admittance on rerelease. Generally, if there is a revocation of someone in the program, the AUSA recommends the maximum statutory sentence for the violation and then asks the court to return the offender to supervision upon rerelease.²

Once the GRIP participant leaves the halfway house, he or she is placed on a supervision phase system. The initial supervision phase generally requires a minimum of two contacts per week with the probation officer, either in the office or the field; electronic monitoring; and a 10:00 p.m. curfew (unless an exception is approved by the probation officer).

The participant is also required to attend two meetings per month with the judge, probation officers, AUSA, and AFPD. These meetings are held in the U.S. courthouse but are scheduled after 5:00 p.m. to avoid work conflicts for the participants. This schedule

² Federal sentencing laws allow for revocation without reinstatement of supervised release upon the person’s release from incarceration.

requires coordination with the U.S. Marshals Service, which oversees courthouse security.

GRIP program participants are required to dress appropriately when in court, during treatment sessions, and when reporting to their probation officers. Shirts must be worn with tails tucked in at all times, and no hats, gang clothing, gang paraphernalia, or clothing with drug or alcohol themes are allowed ("Gang reentry initiative," 2010).

Prior to a participant's appearance at gang court, the GRIP team reviews his or her case and creates a plan for participation. Each GRIP team member receives an Offender Summary Report, prepared by the probation team and outlining the participant's primary goals, level of compliance, any directives made by the probation office, and any recommended rewards or sanctions. Using this report, the GRIP team discusses each case and creates a course of action.

The initial gang court meeting includes only the participant and the GRIP team. Family members or other interested parties may attend subsequent meetings, if approved by the team.

Program Requirements and Sanctions

Each participant in the program is required to obtain and maintain full-time employment or be enrolled in school, unless disabled. Employment verification is required, and verification contacts are made frequently by the probation officer. If he or she is disabled, the client is required to participate in community service. A participant who has the educational ability, but does not have a high school diploma or a graduate equivalency degree (GED), is required to complete his or her GED prior to being discharged from the program.

Financial requirements from court-ordered fines and/or restitution, along with any child support obligations, are closely monitored by the probation officer, and the client's level of compliance with these requirements is included in summary reports.

Program Rewards

Incentives for successful participation in the GRIP program can range from being given positive feedback by the judge or other GRIP team members to a reduction in the length of supervision. Other rewards include decreased levels of attendance at gang court meetings, bus passes, gift cards to various stores, or other rewards determined by the GRIP team and the participant. A court fund of \$1,500 per year is allotted for incentives.

Typically, GRIP participants have a term of three to eight years of supervision. After a participant successfully completes the GRIP program, his or her total term of supervision is reduced by up to one year. These participants are then required to fulfill their

remaining period of traditional supervision, including compliance with all conditions of supervision.

Program Sanctions

Potential sanctions can include the following:

- Increased reporting
- Writing assignments
- Verbal/written reprimands
- Increased frequency of meetings with probation
- Increased treatment
- Community service
- Curfew
- Electronic monitoring/home confinement
- Residential placement
- Incarceration of varying length
- Revocation
- New indictment or prosecution

Termination from the program may occur because of failure to participate in treatment and supervision, repeated technical violations of conditions of supervision, failure to attend court sessions, or new law violations. Participants terminated from the program return to regular supervision status (they are kept on the gang caseload) and may face a violation hearing.

Services Provided

While sanctions for noncompliance exist, a number of services are also available to participants of the program.

- ***Employment***—Probation officers work with participants to remove barriers to employment. Assistance with employment ranges from job referrals to providing opportunities for entry-level work in desired fields and involvement in apprenticeship programs. The St. Louis district has achieved high rates of employment for individuals under supervision within the U.S. Probation system, using methods such as convening the employment team and hosting job fairs to bring offenders and prospective employers together. The probation officers work with participants to obtain birth certificates and social security cards to aid in finding and maintaining employment. Access to tattoo removal services is also available for participants whose efforts to obtain employment may be hindered by visible tattoos.

- ***Mentoring and Reentry Services***—The agency seeks out mentors for program participants and works with community providers to alleviate barriers to reentry. The probation agency and community resource providers assist participants in obtaining identification and driver's licenses, and team members assist with reinstatement of driving privileges. Transportation assistance, such as locating transit services and obtaining bus passes and shuttle services, is provided.
- ***Child Support***—Many participants leave prison with outstanding child support obligations. The team works with the offender and local courts to set up reasonable payment plans and encourages the participant to address support obligations. In some cases, the team has been successful in getting payments deferred while a participant is in the GRIP program.

The probation officers also work with the local Father Support Center and other groups to provide services and assistance to those under criminal justice supervision to improve their family relationships and help them return successfully to the community (Nicholson, 2013). Parenting classes and counseling to help parolees reconnect with their children and family members are also available.

- ***Financial Services***—Participants are required to obtain bank accounts. The team believes that maintaining a bank account provides a participant with greater financial responsibility and a degree of safety. It alleviates the need to carry large amounts of cash and reduces risks associated with check-cashing businesses. Financial education classes are available, and credit reports can be provided for participants.

The agency also has programs to assist all offenders under supervision not only in obtaining rental housing but also in locating and purchasing a home.

- ***Drug, Education, and Mental Health Counseling***—Educational programs are designed to address identified criminogenic needs. All participants are required to complete a cognitive-behavioral program such as Thinking for a Change³ or Making it Work.⁴

Drug treatment, both residential and outpatient, is available. However, the team has found group therapy less effective for this population because gang-involved offenders tend to talk less in group sessions, especially if other gang members are involved, and they are prone to posturing for other gang members. One area of therapy that has been

³ <http://nicic.gov/t4c>

⁴ <http://www.workinitout.com/>

both effective and necessary is trauma-focused counseling. The team notes that gang-involved offenders often have issues commonly associated with post-traumatic stress disorder. Many of the participants have experienced trauma, including being victims in violent crimes, being involved in shootings, or witnessing the violent deaths of friends/family members. As a result, GRIP participants often feel out of control and have difficulties dealing with more than one issue at a time.

Once this treatment issue was identified, the team persuaded U.S. Probation administrators to provide participants with access to more expensive individual counseling services and worked to identify treatment providers who were willing to work with gang-involved offenders. The team reports that the counselors providing services have never had a problem with GRIP participants in the counseling setting. While mental health issues are the main focus of the counseling, service providers also have been willing to address drug use issues in a one-on-one setting, alleviating the issues that arise when this group is placed in a group drug counseling setting. The AUSA notes, "If they go for mental health counseling, I see it as a success" (Rea, interview, 2012).

Program Outcomes

Because the program was started in March 2010 and the term of supervision is usually three or more years, there has not been enough time to accurately evaluate the effectiveness of the program. During the initial months of the program, no data was kept. The team estimates that between 20 and 25 people were involved in the program as of November 2012, with 1 successful graduation resulting in a reduction in the term of supervision for the participant.

In August 2011, a member was added to the probation gang unit and tasked with keeping data. Between August 25, 2011, and July 12, 2012, there were 15 participants in the GRIP program. As of July 12, 2012, five had been revoked (33 percent), one had a warrant outstanding, and one is on trial for new charges. Of the five who were revoked, three had new criminal charges (20 percent), with the remainder revoked for technical violations (Nicholson, personal correspondence, 2012). As of July 12, 2012, the GRIP program had ten active participants with the following (Nicholson, correspondence, 2012):

- 84 percent were in compliance with drug conditions.
- 75 percent were neither involved in criminal activity nor had warrants outstanding.
- 61 percent were in compliance regarding meeting their individual program goals.
- 57 percent were in compliance with reporting conditions.

Statistics for the program were again compiled on May 3, 2013. The active caseload in the GRIP program remained at ten, but the composition of participants changed because of graduation, termination, and revocation. During the 10-month period between July 2012 and May 2013, the revocation rate rose to 50 percent. Compliance percentages dropped in three of the four categories (Schmidt, "Memo to GRIP Team," 2013):

- 66 percent were in compliance with drug conditions.
- 58 percent were neither involved in criminal activity nor had warrants outstanding.
- 61 percent were in compliance regarding meeting their individual program goals.
- 54 percent were in compliance with reporting conditions.

Certainly, compliance statistics are prone to change as the makeup of the participant group changes.

According to U.S. Probation's latest risk assessment tool, the Post-Conviction Risk Assessment, high-risk offenders, including participants in the GRIP program, have a 70-percent chance of being revoked and a 42-percent chance of being arrested within the first 30 days of supervision (Schmidt, "Memo to GRIP Team," 2012). Based on this data, revocations for GRIP participants are almost 30 percent lower than those for comparable high-risk offenders.

While the program has not been in operation long enough to be formally evaluated, it appears that GRIP has had a positive effect on recidivism and has shown a reduction in continued violent activity by participants. While the number of participants is small and the process of intervening with gang-involved offenders can be slow, the program appears to have changed the behavior patterns of participants. GRIP program staff emphasize that it may take several attempts for GRIP participants to succeed in the program and that revocations for nonviolent offenses occasionally occur, but this represents a large improvement over the statistical predictions for these high-risk offenders. AUSA Rea explained that the GRIP participants, who have a history of violent offending, have changed their general behavior patterns: "With one exception, there have been no violent crimes relating to firearms or violence [committed by GRIP participants]" (Rea, interview, 2012).

GRIP Program Summary

Research indicates that successful reentry programs address parolee success on multiple levels. These programs assess client risk, conduct preplanning, support parolees in obtaining housing and employment, provide access to substance abuse and mental health services, create community partnerships, engage the family, and quickly respond to supervision violations.

The Urban Institute has identified 13 supervision strategies that assist with offender reentry (Solomon et al., 2008, pp. 4–5):

1. Define success as recidivism reduction and measure performance.
2. Tailor conditions of supervision.
3. Focus resources on moderate- and high-risk offenders.
4. Front-load supervision resources.
5. Implement earned discharge.
6. Implement place-based supervision.
7. Engage partners to expand intervention capabilities.
8. Assess criminogenic risk and need factors.
9. Develop and implement supervision case plans that balance surveillance and treatment.
10. Involve offenders to enhance their engagement in assessment, case planning, and supervision.
11. Engage informal social controls to facilitate community reintegration.
12. Incorporate incentives and rewards into the supervision process.
13. Employ graduated problem-solving responses to violations of supervision conditions in a swift and certain manner.

The GRIP program employs all of these strategies with gang-involved offenders. But how cost-effective is this program? There are four probation officers involved at least part-time in the program, plus an AUSA, an AFPD, and a federal judge, for the supervision of ten gang-involved offenders. Using the PRCA prediction of 70 percent recidivism for this risk group, seven of the ten GRIP participants already would have returned to prison, with a yearly incarceration cost of \$28,948 per offender (“Cost of Incarceration and Supervision,” 2013). The return to incarceration of those seven offenders would have resulted in a total incarceration cost of \$202,636 per year. This figure does not include the cost to the community of the violent crimes that have been prevented.

In comparison, under the GRIP program, it costs an average of \$2,643.50 per year (“Cost of Incarceration and Supervision,” 2013) to keep each offender under supervision in the community, a savings of \$26,304.50 per year per offender. Thus, a strong argument can be made that the program is not only effective in reducing crime but also cost-effective.

GRIP team members note that the GRIP program is a work in progress and that more time is required to review programs/policies and collect statistical data on participant outcomes.

While drug, reentry, and mental health courts have grown in number, the GRIP program is the only gang court in the federal probation system. Gang-involved offenders are a difficult population to supervise and work with. But achieving a reduction in recidivism

and decreased involvement in violent crime for this population creates immeasurable savings, not only in dollars but in the reduction of violence in the community.

Yakima County Gang Court

Yakima County is located in south-central Washington, covering an area of 4,296 square miles, which makes it the second largest county in the state. The population of the county is a little more than 240,000 residents, and Yakima is the largest city in the county, with a population of more than 90,000. The county is composed primarily of small rural communities and claims to have more fruit trees than any other county in the United States, hence its nickname “the fruit zone.” Yakima County produces “more apples, mint, winter pears, and hops than any other county” in America (Yakima County, Washington).

Like much of the rest of Washington State, the population of Yakima County experienced considerable demographic changes between 2000 and 2010:

Table 1. Demographic Changes in Yakima County From 2000 to 2010					
White, non-Hispanic		Non-white, non-Hispanic and White, non-Hispanic		Hispanic	
2000	2010	2000	2010	2000	2010
56.88	47.86	7.22	7.13	35.90	45.01
% change: -9.02%		% change: -.09%		% change: +9.11%	
("2012 population trends," 2012, p. 52)					

Employment in Yakima tends to be seasonal and focused on agricultural products and food-processing operations. Yakima is the 12th largest agriculture production area in the United States and is home to processing plants for several large international companies, including Smuckers, Seneca Foods, Tree Top, Delmonte, and AB Foods/Washington Beef (“Key Industries,” n.d.). This increased demand for agricultural workers has resulted in a large demographic change in the community, with an increased number of migrant agricultural workers, including immigrants from Mexico and Central America, settling in Yakima. Between 2000 and 2010, the percentage of Yakima County residents of Hispanic origin increased by 25 percent.

The per capita income in Yakima is 64.7 percent (\$19,730) of the Washington average, making Yakima County residents among the poorest in the state. The rate of persons living below poverty (21.4 percent) in Yakima is 1.7 times the Washington average of 12.5 percent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). Many Yakima residents struggle with poverty, language barriers, healthcare needs, and citizenship issues, and Yakima County agencies

and schools have been hard-pressed to adjust to the changing needs of youth and families in the community.

According to a 2010 Washington State Gang Intelligence Bulletin created by Northwest High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area, Hispanic gangs, such as the Nuestra Familia and Mexican Mafia (aka La Eme) prison gangs and the Norteños and Sureños street gang sets, have been active in Yakima since the 1970s and 1980s, and the number of gang members is growing, particularly on a per capita basis. The report notes that “there are 300 active street gangs in Washington State with approximately 15,000 members” (Rodríguez, 2010, p. 2). Of these 300 gangs, Yakima is home to 40 different sets (13 percent) of street gangs that are active in Washington (Rodríguez, 2010).

Crime reports per capita indicate that Yakima’s violent crime problem is substantial, and a review of recent newspaper headlines indicates that many of these crimes involve suspected gang members. In May 2012, two of the ten cities in Washington with the highest rate of crimes per capita were located in Yakima County:

Union Gap (ranked number three in the state): “Another Yakima suburb, Union Gap, saw a total crime rate of 114 crimes reported per 1,000 residents, a decrease of 9 percent from 2010. Its violent crime rate was also among the highest in the state at 5.9 violent crimes reported per 1,000 residents.”

Wapato (ranked number nine in the state): “This suburb of Yakima saw 72 crimes reported per 1,000 residents, a 13 percent increase since 2010. It also saw more than its share of violent crime, with 7.4 assaults, rapes or murders reported per 1,000 residents” (“Washington’s best and worst,” 2012). (“Washington’s best and worst,” 2012)

Formation of the Yakima County Gang Court

In June 2011, in response to rising community concerns about local gang issues, criminal justice stakeholders in Yakima County met to discuss possible strategies that could be used to inhibit gang activity. These stakeholders looked at several models and decided to pilot a new program: the Yakima Gang Court (YGC), a court-based program that adapts strategies utilized by drug court programs around the United States. The YGC is based in the Yakima County Juvenile Court, and the YGC convened a team of service providers, justice agencies, and other youth advocates to provide structure, support, and therapeutic interventions to participants.

Judge Susan Hahn notes,

When we first developed our Gang Court model in 2011, we knew what we wanted to accomplish, but we didn't necessarily know how to get there. We had two choices. We could discuss it ad nauseam or jump in and go. We chose the latter course and we are glad we did. Much of what we have learned occurred because we were trying new things and "tweaking" the program to make it better . . . we will continue to make changes as necessary to accomplish our goals (Hahn and Berndt, 2012, p. 1).

Original Program Structure

The original structure of the YGC included an assigned juvenile court judge, an assigned probation officer, and a team of court-contracted service providers and representatives from the local school district, the Yakima County Public Defender's Office, the Yakima County Prosecutor's Office, Yakima County Juvenile Probation, the Yakima Police Department, and youth advocates. Shortly after starting the YGC, the Yakima County Juvenile Court applied for and received an 18-month Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (Gates Foundation) grant that provided funding to hire two former gang members to work as gang intervention specialists (Hahn and Berndt, 2012). The gang intervention specialists were hired as juvenile court employees and supervised by a juvenile probation officer. They were assigned to provide one-on-one assistance to YGC clients and to work with up to 50 moderate- and high-risk clients outside of the program who were assigned by the court and probation officers to receive evidence-based program services. The gang intervention specialist component would prove to be one of the most challenging aspects of the YGC program model.

The YGC requires three hours of court time weekly to oversee a docket of 12 participants. This time allocation includes 1.5 hours for the pre-court treatment provider meeting and 1.5 hours for time in court with participants. This model (apart from the gang intervention specialists) is able to operate without additional funding by utilizing existing juvenile court personnel: a juvenile court judge and an assigned probation officer. Local prosecutors, defense attorneys, law enforcement officers, agency personnel, and advocates absorb the extra time they spend on the YGC into their existing budgets. Service providers already contracted to offer evidence-based treatment to court-involved youth also attend the YGC sessions; youth in the YGC are

able to receive these existing services—including aggression replacement therapy (ART), functional family therapy (FFT), and multi-systemic therapy (MST)—at no charge.

The YGC faced a number of initial challenges. Existing statutes and policies for juvenile court systems in Washington limited the YGC’s supervision of clients to a maximum of one year per adjudicated offense. Juvenile offenders were encouraged to voluntarily participate in the court, as they could not be court-ordered onto the YGC caseload. The YGC implemented an increased level of supervision and therapeutic intervention for gang-involved participants. Consequently, defense attorneys were reluctant to recommend youth participation in the YGC unless the offender was likely to receive a sentence to a secure juvenile facility.

As a result of these challenges, the court’s initial pool of clients was composed of gang-involved juvenile offenders who were often deeply involved in the juvenile justice system, and the YGC was limited to serving these clients for only one year. If, at the end of 12 months, a client successfully completed the conditions of the YGC, a pre-agreed sentencing recommendation would be made to the court by prosecutors. The disposition of the case would be entered and the conviction recorded, but no further penalty would be ordered by the court. For youth with pending sentences to the Juvenile Rehabilitation Authority (JRA), successful completion of YGC requirements would result in a credit for time served in lieu of being ordered into the custody of JRA.

Evolution of the Washington Juvenile Gang Court Model

In June 2012, the Washington State Legislature, based on feedback from the YGC and other stakeholders, enacted the Revised Code of Washington (RCW) Statute 13.40.700, which statutorily enabled counties to create juvenile gang courts and defined the structure of these courts as follows:

“Juvenile gang court” means a court that has special calendars or dockets designed to achieve a reduction in gang-related offenses among juvenile offenders by increasing their likelihood for successful rehabilitation through early, continuous, and judicially supervised and integrated evidence-based services proven to reduce juvenile recidivism and gang involvement or through the use of research-based or promising practices identified by the Washington state partnership council on juvenile justice.

This legislation required some changes to the structure of the existing YGC. Based on the new gang court legislation, juvenile gang courts are permitted to defer disposition for eligible participants, and on successful completion of gang court requirements, the charges against YGC participants are dismissed without prejudice. RCW 13.40.700 also empowered juvenile gang courts to extend jurisdiction over participants for longer than 12 months.

RCW 13.40.700 created minimum screening criteria for juvenile gang court participants in Washington. To receive deferred disposition into juvenile gang court, it must be shown that:

- The juvenile offender participates in gang activity, is repeatedly in the company of known gang members, or openly admits that he or she has been admitted to a gang.
- The juvenile offender must voluntarily agree to participate in the gang court.
- The juvenile offender's participation must be approved by the court and the prosecutor.

To balance the interests of public safety with the goal of juvenile intervention, RCW 13.40.700 prohibits participation in gang court for juvenile offenders who have previously committed or are currently charged with serious offenses. The statute defines such offenses as follows:

- (b) The juvenile offender has not previously been convicted of a serious violent offense or sex offense as defined in RCW 9.94A.030; and
- (c) The juvenile offender is not currently charged with an offense:
 - (i) That is a class A felony offense;
 - (ii) That is a sex offense;
 - (iii) During which the juvenile offender intentionally discharged, threatened to discharge, or attempted to discharge a firearm in furtherance of the offense;
 - (iv) That subjects the juvenile offender to adult court original jurisdiction pursuant to RCW 13.04.030(1)(e)(v); or
 - (v) That constitutes assault of a child in the second degree.

Juvenile offenders who wish to participate in the YGC must execute a "Statement of Juvenile for Entry into YGC" form. This form is similar to deferred prosecution forms but includes a description of the YGC program and its requirements. If a juvenile offender meets the statutory requirements, an Order for Entry into YGC is signed by the judge and the youth is scheduled for his/her first YGC session.

Current Structure and Elements of the Program

The changes in state law required minor adjustments to the YGC. Current and previous program elements/personnel participating in the YGC include the following:

Juvenile Court Judge

The docket of YGC participants is assigned to a single juvenile court judge to maintain continuity and familiarity with the circumstances of individual clients. The judge spends approximately three hours per week presiding over the weekly pre-court provider

meeting and overseeing creation and revision of the YGC's intervention strategy and case management plan for each client. An additional 1.5 hours per week is spent in court overseeing case reviews of YGC participants. The frequency of court reviews is determined by a phase system based on the participant's performance in completing the intervention activities recommended by the YGC.

Participant interactions with the juvenile court judge make it clear that not only is the YGC structured around assisting participants with meeting court conditions, but the judge has a personal interest and investment in their individual success. The regular, structured court reviews also allow the participants to develop a stronger relationship with the judge over time and to see the judge and court personnel as being supportive of their efforts. Several gang court cases are reviewed during each weekly court session, which also allows participants in the early phases of the program to watch the progress of other participants, including the imposition of sanctions by the court when needed and the celebration of successful completion/graduation when earned.

Juvenile Probation Officer

YGC participants are assigned to the caseloads of two designated probation counselors. These probation officers also manage other probationers, but the size of their overall caseload is slightly reduced so that they can provide a higher level of supervision and support to YGC clients. When participants are accepted into the YGC, the assigned probation counselor completes an initial risk assessment utilizing the Washington State Juvenile Risk Assessment. This risk assessment helps to narrow the YGC's focus for individual clients. The probation counselor also conducts a face-to-face meeting with each client to introduce him/her to the YGC program requirements and to discuss the client's needs and goals.

Based on the risk assessment and initial interview, the probation counselors prepare a written report for the YGC client case management team that makes recommendations for court-ordered conditions of probation, necessary services, and recommended activities. This report is reviewed by the judge and the Provider Team, who provide additional feedback to the plan.

The probation officers provide supervision of YGC clients, including regular substance use screenings, face-to-face visits, tracking client progress on accomplishing intervention activities and school attendance, and providing regular updates on clients to the Provider Team.

Provider Team

The Provider Team meets once a week, for 1.5 hours, before YGC hearings and is composed of representatives from (Kirschenmann, *personal correspondence*, 2013):

- Central Washington Comprehensive Mental Health
- Farm Workers Behavior Health

- Systems of Care—Wrap Around
- Educational Service District 105
- Team Child
- Local service providers for evidence-based services (functional family therapy, aggression replacement therapy, multi-systemic therapy)
- Merit Treatment
- Dependency Health Services
- Victory Outreach Church
- Yakima County Juvenile Court Community Service Program
- Yakima County Juvenile Court Mentoring Program
- Department of Assigned Counsel (public defender's office)
- Yakima County Prosecutor's Office
- Yakima Police Department
- Other law enforcement agencies

When a client is initially accepted into the program, the team reviews the probation officer's risk assessment and intake interview report, and then works together to design a customized plan for the client. This plan selects the most appropriate service referrals and required activities for each client and identifies and seeks to remove barriers that might inhibit the client's participation in these activities, such as long-term nonparticipation in school. Once the plan is approved by the Provider Team, it is written into the client's court order. The team meetings also are used to assign responsibility to agency representatives for completing referral processes for service delivery and program participation, assisting with school enrollment and educational assessments, following up on planned strategies and activities for each client, and tracking the client's progress in completing recommended tasks.

Provider Team meetings are used for new client intake planning and for reviews of existing clients' performance in the YGC on a rotating, as-needed basis predicated on the client's level of participation and success. During these meetings, the judge and members of the Provider Team receive progress updates from service providers, probation officers, school representatives, and law enforcement personnel about the client's current level of gang involvement and activity and the client's participation in services, school, employment, tattoo removal, and other relevant activities.

The face-to-face information sharing that occurs at these meetings extends the reach of the participating agencies and increases the information available to these personnel about the needs, probation conditions, and activities of the YGC clients. The team meetings and information shared by agencies at these meetings also allows the multiple agencies serving these clients to respond more holistically to the factors that have contributed to an individual's involvement with gangs, including family difficulties, problems at school, substance use, mental health issues, peer influences, and barriers to

services, education, or employment. Agencies can also use these meetings to take into consideration the work being performed by the other providers.

The regularly scheduled meeting structure allows the juvenile court to immediately respond to noncompliance by YGC clients or safety issues that might affect the clients or the wider community. These meetings also provide an opportunity to establish stronger relationships and enhanced information sharing and collaboration among the agencies that are involved.

Program Phases

As the YGC has evolved, the court has implemented a more structured phase system for managing the needs and goals of program participants.

Phase 1—Evaluation

The initial phase of the program, referred to as Evaluation, serves as an introduction for clients to the enhanced support and accountability provided by the YGC. Clients in this phase attend mandatory gang court hearings once a week.

Many of these clients are accustomed to large amounts of free, unsupervised time. Some have not regularly attended school for several months or years. Most have multiple, critical needs—from functional illiteracy and family difficulties to substance addictions and mental health problems—that predate their involvement in gangs. In the initial phase of the program, the YGC team has learned that “it is important to prioritize needs so that services aren’t piled on, overwhelming the child. Additionally, some problems need to be solved first, so others can be effectively treated” (Hahn and Berndt, 2012, p. 3). During this phase, clients reenroll in school, become used to meeting with the court and the probation counselor on a weekly basis, and gradually ease into the process of participation in the YGC.

Judge Hahn says that for many YGC participants, “This is a honeymoon period with high hopes and good commitment” (Hahn and Berndt, 2012, p. 3). They are excited about the opportunities that are available to them through the YGC and about receiving a high level of adult support and encouragement, possibly for the first time in their lives. The Evaluation Phase generally lasts four to eight weeks, and services are prioritized to address the most serious/necessary issues first.

Phase 2—Implementation

After a client has reenrolled in school and started attending weekly court hearings and meetings with the probation officer, and a relationship has been established among the youth, his family, and the court, the team begins to implement an individualized court-ordered plan that addresses individual client issues such as family conflict, substance addiction, trauma, learning difficulties, and obtaining employment.

During the Implementation Phase, clients begin to meet with service providers identified in their intervention plans and are expected to follow treatment requirements and court rules, as well as to maintain regular school participation. Most clients are not accustomed to this level of activity or structure and may feel overwhelmed. Some clients who are attending school daily for the first time in months/years may struggle with adjusting to a new lifestyle that requires them to wake up in the morning and get to school. Their attendance may initially be inconsistent, and they may have behavioral difficulties at school. Some clients may wish to give up, and their success in meeting conditions of the YGC may be erratic.

Implementation Phase clients attend YGC hearings on a weekly or biweekly basis. Accountability is essential. Clients learn that as they begin to comply with other requirements, they can reduce their mandatory participation in weekly YGC hearings.

This phase may last for six months or longer.

Phase 3—Stabilization

When clients reach a point in their participation in the YGC at which they have settled into the routine of daily school attendance, attending weekly or biweekly court hearings, meeting with the probation counselor on a regular basis, and following through on other intervention requirements, they are moved to the Stabilization Phase. During this phase of the program, YGC participants improve their consistency in following rules and participating in appointments and services. Over time, they begin to complete some of the required activities in their intervention plans and can now see their progress in achieving their goals. As Judge Hahn explains, “They become more self-directed . . . and start to feel good about what they are accomplishing. . . . [A]s they stabilize, the Court rewards trustworthy behavior by reducing [required attendance at] court hearings to every other week” (Hahn and Berndt, 2012, p. 3).

This phase generally lasts for three to four months.

Phase 4—Maintenance

The fourth phase of the YGC program is called Maintenance, and it focuses on helping a client learn to self-maintain the changes he/she has made. During this phase, the team begins to coordinate reentry and self-sufficiency activities designed to allow the client to transition from the external structure imposed by the YGC to an internalized habit/behavior. The YGC client begins to identify long-term sources of support for his/her changing behavior, such as family members, onsite school personnel, and other involved adults such as coaches, counselors, group leaders, and employers.

Judge Hahn notes :

During this phase, we are planning our exit strategy. We want the baby to fly when it is pushed from the nest. Behaviors have improved dramatically. School is much improved. Not only is the child going, but they are on-time, earning back credits, getting homework in, and raising grades. Random UAs are consistently clean. The child is making plans for the future. Self-identification with the gang life is gone (Hahn and Berndt, 2012, p. 3).

During this phase of the YGC program, accountability is gradually stepped down, and mandatory attendance at court hearings is reduced to once every three to four weeks. The Maintenance Phase generally lasts three to five months.

Program Requirements and Sanctions

All YGC clients must comply with the following minimum requirements, most of which are standard conditions of probation, though some are specific to their history of gang involvement (Hahn and Berndt, 2012, p. 4):

- Do not wear clothing that is identifiable as gang-related.
- Do not engage in graffiti.
- Do not possess weapon.
- Do not possess or use any alcohol or drugs without a prescription.
- Be actively involved in an appropriate educational program.
- Cooperate with all treatment providers, gang intervention specialists, and probation.
- Attend court sessions as scheduled.
- Follow all rules at home, including curfew.
- Follow all court orders.
- Exhibit no gang-related behavior.
- Commit no new offenses.

Graduation from YGC requires successful completion of all four program phases, adherence to court-imposed sanctions, full payment of restitution or substantial reduction of restitution through timely adherence to a payment plan, and clean substance abuse screenings for three months prior to graduation.

If YGC clients fail to follow these requirements, possible court-imposed sanctions include the following (Hahn and Berndt, 2012, p. 4):

- Community service hours
- Additional court appearances
- Electronic monitoring
- Bench warrants
- Enhanced curfew requirements
- Temporary incarceration in detention
- Demotion in program level
- Termination of participation in YGC

If a client commits additional criminal offenses while under the jurisdiction of the YGC, the prosecuting attorney has discretion to file new charges or handle the charges as a violation of YGC rules. Youth who are convicted of new offenses are subject to the termination of their participation in the YGC and the restoration of previously deferred sentences against them.

Evolution of the Role of the Gang Intervention Specialists

The gang intervention specialists served an assigned caseload of four to five YGC clients and an additional pool of up to 25 gang-involved youth who were not assigned to gang court (Berndt, 2013). Their primary role was to serve as a support system for these clients, including providing coaching/mentoring on leaving the gang lifestyle and fulfilling juvenile probation conditions. The gang intervention specialists served different geographic areas: one was assigned to serve clients residing in the city of Yakima, and the other was assigned to serve clients in the southern two-thirds of the county. Both were former gang members who were recommended to the YGC by community leaders.

Unfortunately, as in many other rural counties, the Yakima County Juvenile Court (YCJC) lacked experience in gang-specific interventions and the safety issues involved in working with a gang-involved population. The YCJC also had never previously employed paraprofessionals with previous gang involvement. The YGC and the YCJC lacked clear job descriptions for the gang intervention specialists, whose role differed substantially from those of other court employees. The gang intervention specialists occasionally struggled with professional requirements of their positions, such as documenting client contacts, meeting deadlines, spending most of their working hours meeting independently with clients in the community, and explaining their role in the YGC to local gang members.

The agencies involved in the Provider Team and YCJC staff also had varying perceptions of the role that these personnel should play in the YGC program. Some agencies viewed

the gang intervention specialists as “big brothers” and mentors to the YGC clients who were responsible for making regular visits to clients and supporting their efforts to change; some saw them as van drivers who were responsible to transport clients from home to service locations or court; and others treated them as the equivalent of probation “trackers.”⁵

On different occasions, each of the gang intervention specialists was threatened by local gang members who did not understand the specialists’ role in the program and viewed them as a threat to the gang or to gang members who were participating in the YGC program, as YCJC probation trackers, or as snitches/confidential informants.

The lack of experience and available training on issues specific to working with gang populations undermined the effectiveness of the gang intervention specialist component of the YGC program and exposed the gang intervention specialists to safety risks in the community. YCJC recognized the need to develop clearer job descriptions and safety protocols for the gang intervention specialists, as well as training for the Provider Team with regards to the expectations and roles of the gang intervention specialists.

During 2012, YCJC requested and received specialized training and technical assistance from the National Gang Center on multidisciplinary gang intervention team procedures as well as follow-up training for both the gang intervention specialists and the Provider Team on protocols for gang intervention workers and working with gang populations. YCJC also provided training for the gang intervention specialists in professional development areas such as motivational interviewing, mediation, and client case management. This created improvements in the functioning of the gang intervention specialists and their interactions with the Provider Team and YGC clients.

The Gates Foundation funding that paid for the gang intervention specialists was exhausted in January 2013, and the YGC was unable to obtain funding to sustain the gang intervention component after that point.

Program Outcomes

A program evaluation on the YGC is currently being conducted by the Gates Foundation. A preliminary evaluation of 12 YGC clients found reduced risk factors and increased protective factors for clients in the program based on a two-part, time-series risk assessment administered during entry into the program and then re-administered at some point between the third and sixth months of participation in the YGC.

⁵ Probation trackers are paraprofessionals who track probation participation and conduct substance abuse screenings for probationers.

For comparison purposes, data was also collected on a pool of YCJC probation clients, the Yakima Gang Project (YGP) participants, who also received assistance from the gang intervention specialists and participated in at least one of the three evidence-based treatment programs (FFT, MST, or ART) but did not participate in the full YGC program. These clients tended to have lower levels of court involvement than did YGC clients, and they also were viewed by YCJC as being less at risk for gang membership or offending. In some instances, however, YGP participants were found to have higher levels of risk than did YGC participants.

Preliminary evaluation findings suggest that the YGC resulted in significant positive outcomes in reductions of risk factors and increases in protective factors for the 12 program clients that it served during 2011–2012, and that these outcomes were much greater for YGC participants than for the control group of YGP youth that received lower levels of services and did not participate in YGC hearings and integrated provider case management. In some domains, YGP participants showed increased levels of risk after participating in the YGP program. This speaks to the complexities in achieving positive programmatic outcomes with gang-involved clients.

Table 2. Preliminary Evaluation Outcomes for YGC and YGP Participants (2011–2012) (Bolan, 2013)⁶

DOMAIN	GANG COURT (N=12)		GANG PROJECT (N=30)	
	TIME 1	TIME 2	TIME 1	TIME 2
RISK FACTOR				
3A: School History	4.08	3.75	4.67	4.77
3B: Current School Status	9.75	6.25	10.93	7.53
7B: Current Living Arrangements	12.83	9.17	1.33	12.60
10: Attitudes/Behaviors	10.33	7.92	10.10	10.17
11: Aggression	5.83	4.92	5.70	5.23
12: Skills	9.58	6.83	7.33	6.40
TOTAL RISK SCORE	90.0	76.2	87.2	87.6
Change	-13.8 points (-15.3%)		+4 points (.04%)	
PROTECTIVE FACTOR				
3A: School History	1.83	2.17	1.73	1.47
3B: Current School Status	1.67	4.00	2.03	1.90
7B: Current Living Arrangements	8.25	11.17	8.24	8.70
10: Attitudes/Behaviors	3.50	6.25	3.63	3.30
11: Aggression	1.08	0.58	1.70	1.67
12: Skills	5.00	7.42	6.37	7.23
TOTAL PROTECTION SCORE	40.9	54.3	45.4	46.8
% change	+13.4 (+32.8%)		+1.4 points (+3%)	

⁶ www.marcbolanconsulting.com

YGC clients experienced reductions of risk in all domains, particularly in school participation, living arrangements, attitudes and behaviors, and skills. YGC participants also experienced increases in protective factors in these same areas (Bolan, 2013).

These evaluation findings are quite possibly a reflection of the combination of multiple services that YGC participants uniformly received:

- Intensive supervision by probation officers
- Integrated and collaborative case management services from the Provider Team
- One or more evidence-based services such as FFT, MST, or ART
- Intensive contacts and mentoring from gang intervention specialists
- Regularly scheduled YGC hearings

The evaluation findings above do not specify which of these activities, or which combination and dosage of these activities and services, accounts for the significant reductions in risk factors (-15.3 percent) and increases in protective factors (+32.8 percent) for YGC participants. In fact, it might be theorized that each of the elements of the program contributed in a meaningful way to improving the individual circumstances of these gang-involved clients. The large changes in substantive areas of risk and protection may perhaps point to the effectiveness and power of the court system—working in tandem with other service providers, the school system, and family services, and focusing on clients in multiple ways and with multiple services—to achieve marked changes in the life circumstances of program participants. It appears unlikely, based on the risk and protective scores achieved with the YGP participants, that these changes in risk/protective factors for YGC participants would have been achieved by a single one of the elements described above.

As of January 2013, the YGC reports the following programmatic results (Berndt, personal correspondence, 2013):

- Fifteen clients participated.
- Fifteen (100 percent) of YGC clients reenrolled in school and improved school performance.
- Three clients successfully completed program requirements and graduated from the YGC.
- One client successfully completed probation but, due to the constraints of existing state laws, could only receive services from the YGC for 6 months.
- Three clients were active as of February 15, 2013; two are projected to successfully complete in February 2013.
- Five clients requested to be removed from the program (prior to enactment of RCW 13.40.700).

- Five clients dropped out of the program; two of the five reoffended and were committed to JRA.
- Three youth were revoked for violations in the program and committed to JRA.

Three youth who participated in the YGC during 2012 otherwise would have been sentenced to a JRA facility in Washington for a total of 651 days at a cost of \$250.00 per day. For just these three clients, the YGC saved the state of Washington approximately \$162,750 (Berndt, personal correspondence, 2013).

Recommendations for Future Gang Court Programs

While these programs have delivered some initially promising results and address an area of concern for both juvenile and adult courts, there are some crucial considerations for implementing programming for gang-involved clients within the court setting.

Addressing Client and Community Safety Issues

Gangs are well-known for involvement in violent crime, particularly targeting rival gangs. Gang threats and attacks directed at law enforcement and criminal justice personnel, including judges, have become increasingly common in many parts of the United States in the past decade. Many street gangs use violence as a tool, not only against rival gangs and outsiders, but also to control or punish their own members who violate the gang's rules and expectations. The gang's leaders may not willingly release individual gang members from their commitments to the gang and may use violence or threats of violence to keep them involved.

Clients who seek to leave the gang need coaching and assistance through this process, and program personnel need to ensure the safety of these clients both from rival gang members and from their own gangs. Program personnel who work with gang populations also can become targets for gang-related crime and violence. The possibility of this type of gang-related violence should be a key consideration when piloting court-based strategies for this population. Criminal justice systems should carefully assess the level of gang activity and violence in the local community as part of the strategic implementation of court-based programs. These systems also should consider the messages that are conveyed, either intentionally or inadvertently, to local gangs by the program's structure, name, requirements, and personnel's actions. The involvement of local law enforcement agencies in developing protocols to protect the safety of clients, community members, and program personnel is essential.

Training and Cultural Competence

Programs that target gang populations require a high level of cultural competence from personnel who are interacting with clients and extensive training for the agencies involved. Standardized and ongoing training should not only include discussions of

cultural issues specific to the population being served (e.g., language barriers) and development of work-related skills (e.g., interviewing, case management, and client supervision) but also provide personnel with:

- Thorough information about local gangs and their graffiti, clothing, symbols, and other identifiers
- An understanding of the alliances and rivalries between local gangs and any history that may provoke future violence or conflicts
- Safety issues related to gangs, including gang-specific cultural factors such as respect/disrespect, nonverbal cues of impending conflict, and protocols that should be followed in the event of an emergency or a violent situation
- Skill development in relationship-building with high-risk, low-income, and racially/ethnically diverse youth and families
- Other issues specific to the community

It is impossible, for instance, for a juvenile probation officer/counselor to enforce gang-specific conditions of probation without being trained to recognize local gang graffiti, colors, clothing, symbols, and identifiers. Thorough training of court employees and program partners is essential in order to deliver effective results, and this is particularly important when the program is serving active gang members.

Mental Health and Counseling Services

The St. Louis Gang Court has found that group counseling programs were less effective for the gang-involved population than one-on-one services. Such participants are reluctant to disclose personal information in front of a group, and if other gang members are involved in the group setting, these individuals might act out or posture in disruptive or even violent ways. Many gang-involved clients, whether juvenile or adult, have been exposed to a higher-than-average level of violence and/or personal victimization. As a result, counseling programs that can address post-traumatic stress disorder are necessary. Court-based programs must ensure that mental health and counseling partners and providers are ready and able to serve a high-risk population, including implementing safety protocols and restructuring programming when necessary to meet specific needs.

Hiring Ex-Gang Members

Some programs and agencies may believe that hiring former gang members provides instant credibility for anti-gang programming or can offer gang-involved clients the “inside scoop” on how to leave gangs. However, while the experiences and authenticity that these employees can provide is extremely valuable, hiring former gang members can come with an equal number of problems.

Young people who join a gang typically experience an accumulation of multiple risk factors in multiple domains of their lives (e.g., home, school, peers, and personal

characteristics) than do other youth. An individual who decides to leave the gang life and create a new identity may have good intentions, but addressing the root causes of his/her gang affiliation and self-identification as a gang member may take years.

An agency that hires an ex-gang member to perform intervention work must be prepared to provide that employee with intensive support and coaching on a variety of issues, from professionalism to personal life. Former gang members may lack previous consistent work experience and may struggle with maintaining consistent work hours, handling conflicts with other employees, managing vacation time and financial concerns, and balancing work and family responsibilities.

Further, breaking ties with the gang that previously served as the primary support system for the gang member is difficult. It is important for agencies to vet former gang members being considered as possible employees by working with local law enforcement agencies to ensure that those gang ties are truly cut. It is not advisable for a criminal justice agency to hire an individual who has not been gang- and crime-free for several years. Otherwise, the program risks transmission of gang culture, affiliations, and attitudes from intervention employees to program clients.

Preparation to Serve Gang-Involved Clients

Programs need to be realistic in assessing their ability to serve gang-involved clients and in identifying the size and specific needs of the community that the program will serve. Factors to consider include the following:

- Availability and access to necessary services
- Existing relationships with key partners such as law enforcement agencies, schools, and service providers
- The ability to address obstacles such as citizenship issues or language barriers
- The criminal justice agency's background and experience in serving gang-involved and high-risk populations

Criminal justice agencies that do not have a strong background in supervising gang-involved offenders are advised to seek out partnerships and expertise from other agencies and resources, such as local law enforcement gang units, grassroots advocacy groups, and high-quality (preferably evaluated or evidence-based) gang outreach programs.

The necessary dosage of programmatic services to achieve client outcomes and the desired effect on the community served by the program are also important considerations. Gang-involved clients are typically exposed to multiple risk factors in several domains of risk for a significant percentage of every day. Programs need to carefully consider the level of dosage of services, support, contacts with program personnel, and accountability that will be required to counteract those risk factors, and

also which specific risk factors can be mitigated to prevent recidivism. Pre- and post-risk assessments can assist with this process.

Working in Large Geographic and/or Rural Areas

Serving a large, rural geographic area poses additional programmatic difficulties for program personnel, including spending large amounts of time traveling to make contacts with clients, ensuring client access to services that may be unavailable in some areas, and arranging transportation for clients and their families who are required to attend mandatory court hearings and treatment meetings but do not have access to a vehicle. It may be advisable to begin a program of this type in a single community or neighborhood, test program efficacy and client outcomes, and then use those positive outcomes to leverage funding to expand the program into other areas.

Juvenile Court Programs Versus Adult Court Programs

Gangs rarely recognize the artificial constraints of the systems that are set up to manage and respond to their activities. Police jurisdictional boundaries and court jurisdictions do not limit the membership or activities of gangs. Within a single multigenerational gang, gang members can range from pre-teens to senior citizens. One limitation of juvenile court-based programming can be the inability to serve program clients who have reached the age of legal majority (between 18 and 21 years of age, depending on state laws). Adult court programs are similarly limited, in that they cannot extend their reach to younger, juvenile-intervention clients with whom their efforts might achieve higher positive outcomes. These gaps in legal mandate suggest that collaborative programs between juvenile and adult court systems might be appropriate to serve the “in-between” population of 17- to 21-year-old gang members that in many communities also represents one of the largest demographic percentages of suspects in gang-involved crimes.

In both juvenile and adult programs, it is important to have rewards for participation and not to make involvement in gang court programs appreciably more restrictive than general supervision. While there should be an added supervision requirement that participants attend gang court hearings, other obligations such as number of contacts with probation officers per month, job search/employment, or educational attendance and participation in counseling programs should be required of clients whether or not they are involved in a gang court program. Benefits of involvement in the program should be apparent, such as performance awards and a reduced term of supervision upon successful completion.

Conclusion

Preliminary outcome data and evaluation findings from the St. Louis Gang Court and the YGC appear to be positive. These programs may represent an effective approach for local court systems to serve gang-involved offenders with challenging needs and a pattern of higher-level offending. These are intensive models that focus multiple, coordinated strategies performed by partner and contractor agencies on a small group of gang-involved court clients. As a result, the programs seem to be effective at meeting the needs of gang-involved clients, assisting with completion of court requirements, providing participants with the impetus and support needed to make substantive changes, and protecting overall community safety.

In both programs, however, client numbers are limited because of the structure of the models and the participant requirements. It should be noted that in both areas, gang court clients represent only a small percentage of the total number of gang members who are active in the community and involved in the court systems.

For that reason, gang courts probably should be implemented as a component of a community or criminal justice system's overall gang prevention, intervention, and suppression strategy, and not as stand-alone programs that are expected to reduce the community's or system's overall level of gang involvement and crime.

In other words, gang courts represent a piece of the puzzle for solving local gang-related crime and violence problems, but they are unlikely to achieve measurable reductions in community-level gang crime unless implemented on a much wider scale and/or as part of a larger, more comprehensive community/criminal justice system strategy to address gangs.

Dr. Irving Spergel, a pioneer in gang intervention research, appears to have been correct when he wrote:

It is perhaps unlikely that social work, through either casework or group work (or street-club work), or combinations of these methods, even on a large scale, will affect substantially the character or reduce the incidence of gang fighting in the neighborhood . . . only as the larger conventional society opens the floodgates of opportunity and provides a massive program whereby adequate schooling, good jobs, better housing, and health and social services of a broad range and high quality are more fully available to low-status groups will delinquency of the conflict variety be eliminated or transformed. (Spergel, 1961, p. 45)

These gang court programs address a wide range of problems and barriers for gang members by providing participants with supported opportunities to pursue educational goals, obtain meaningful employment, address family issues and conflicts, gain skills in a variety of realms (from addressing personal aggression to managing financial issues), and access necessary drug/alcohol/mental health and counseling services, all within a structure that also holds participants accountable. As a result, positive outcomes with participants seem almost predictable.

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