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Grassroots Organization Model

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Statement of the Gang Problem

The youth gang problem is spreading across the nation. It is growing worse in certain central city areas and is also appearing in middle and smaller size cities as well as in suburban communities. Gang problems may be chronic with phases of extreme or lethal violence in certain neighborhoods. Problems may be just emerging and relatively minor in others where gang groups are just forming. These problem neighborhoods or jurisdictions also vary by such characteristics as level of income, stability, race/ethnicity, and mobility of residents.

In chronic gang problem communities, gangs are entrenched. They are relatively well organized, have long histories and may be in varying degrees parts of gang "nations" or networks of gangs across neighborhoods and cities, if not states, at least in terms of sharing a common name, identity, and distinctive symbols. Present and former youth gang members in these areas can be increasingly involved in drug trafficking. Some of the youth may be from second or third generation gang families, although not all family members are necessarily gang members.

In emerging problem communities or neighborhoods, the extent and nature of the gang problem is somewhat less serious. It may develop, in part, as a result of the migration of families with gang affiliated youth from chronic gang problem areas and deteriorating local social and economic conditions. However, local youth are at the heart of the problem despite external influence. In many of the emerging problem areas, particularly on the west coast, gangs are increasingly interracial and the nature of gang problems is a complex mixture of gang patterns of the past decade. In such neighborhoods or communities, there is also a tendency at first by authorities to deny the existence of a gang problem in order to protect community and organizational interests and reputations. However, denial delays community and organizational planning and efforts to successfully cope with the problem and gives the youth gang an opportunity to better organize.

Both in chronic and emerging gang contexts, a part of the local community has suffered a significant loss of social and economic resources, institutions of family and school which are traditionally responsible for youth socialization have been weakened, and agencies and community groups have failed to identify, organize and concentrate efforts on the problem. The community has lost social control over a sector of its youth population. These neighborhoods are increasingly isolated from the values and norms of middle class society. The larger community, on the other hand, tends to ignore the violence, crime, and problems of youth in these communities so long as such activities do not directly affect its own safety and way of life.

The Grassroots Organization

One important means which often arises in inner city or changing communities to confront the youth gang problem is the

grassroots organization. The grassroots organization is a traditional American response to a whole range of problems which affect the local community's welfare and development. Local citizen groups or organizations are created or activated in order to turn their attention to a problem they cannot ignore. Such associations or organizations are based on citizen concern and can be used to mobilize not only local energies and resources but compel external interest and concern, usually by government, to confront local problems such as youth gangs.

Many kinds of grassroots organizations are present which can play a significant role in the control of youth gang crime. The list of such organizations is long and their functions varied. They include organizations which are large or small; public, non-profit, private, or sectarian, bureaucratic or communal, located in or near the impacted community; and directly or indirectly representative of local citizens. They can be stable or ephemeral, focussed on single or multiple issues, professionally and non-professionally staffed, and autonomous or part of other organizations. Some are more or less grassroots oriented, by whatever criteria used.

In almost all cases such associations or organizations claim to represent or identify closely with a specific population. Emphasis is on citizen participation. The interest or function of the grassroots organization concerning youth gangs is usually only one of its concerns. Furthermore, the problem may be addressed directly or indirectly, depending on whether the problem of gangs is viewed as symptomatic of other more basic problems. Some of the types of grassroots organizations which have sought to address the youth gang problem in a myriad of ways have included the following in recent years:

1. Block Clubs: which serve a small geographic area comprising private homes on a single street or a small number of adjacent streets or blocks. They are often concerned with prevention and control of delinquent or gang activities by younger children as well as protection of property.
2. Neighborhood improvement associations: which sometimes encompass networks of block clubs, local business associations, and other local community organizations concerned with issues of police protection, graffiti expunging projects, and economic development directly or indirectly connected with the problem of youth gangs.
3. Tenant organizations: particularly in public housing, concerned with issues of safety including free movement and protection against gang activities, especially drug trafficking.
4. Parent or mother's groups: including parents of

gang members and victims, providing support to each other as well as protection for their children and others through street patrols. They sometimes advocate for specific legislation to protect the community from gangs; they also pressure public agencies, especially police, to do a more effective job of gang control.

5. Citizen patrols, youth patrols, and vigilante groups: attempting with or without the cooperation of police to directly and aggressively suppress gang activity.

6. Local business, fraternal, and other civic organizations: providing a variety of protective and diversionary activities for gang prone and gang member youth as well as economic and educational opportunities directed at reducing and controlling gang crime.

7. Churches and church sponsored groups: especially interested in mobilization of local concern about the failures of public education, youth gang problems as well as holding criminal justice and other public agencies accountable to protect the community and provide for its well being.

8. Social agencies: including youth agencies and social settlements, intimately connected with the local life experience of residents, and with special interest in developing social programs to deal with gang youth.

9. Political organizations and actors: including the local alderman's office, county supervisors, and even state legislators responding to local concerns over gangs.

10. Multi-functional community organizations: broadly utilizing community concerns about the gang problem as well as other issues of education, housing, and economic development to mobilize local interest and participation in order to improve community problem solving capacities.

Goals, Objectives, and Strategies

These grassroots or local organizations should be concerned in some measure with the reduction and control of the youth gang problem. The problem of youth gang crime, from the local community organizational perspective, is often the tip of a more complex set of serious local problems which may be attacked directly or indirectly. The grassroots organization interested in improving the quality of housing or beautifying the neighborhood may launch an effort to demolish abandoned buildings. This, in turn, may

reduce opportunities for gang members to hang-out and even diffuse gang structure. The gang problem may also directly arouse local resident fears and concerns and can be a way of capturing and directing interest to a variety of concerns. It is often used as a general community organizing device. However, to what extent local organizations can focus and sustain local interest on the youth gang problem per se over a substantial period of time is a question. Efforts of local grassroots organizations should be closely combined with those of criminal justice and social agencies to sustain an effective attack on the gang problem.

The local organization serves in various ways to connect the individual, family, and even gang members with the norms, values, and resources of the larger society. The grassroots organization should pursue a variety of strategies towards the specific end of stimulating and integrating individual citizen and community efforts to resolve the gang problem. These include community mobilization, organizational development and change, social intervention, opportunities provision, and suppression. The key strategies for local organization purposes should be a mix of community mobilization, organizational development and suppression.

Community Mobilization. Community Mobilization may be viewed as a strategy uniquely fitted to the grassroots organization. It requires the involvement of people in identifying their concerns about a particular local problem such as gang crime, focussing these concerns, and taking organized action with the support of as wide a spectrum of individuals, groups, and agencies in the community as possible. Its effect should be not only be some resolution of the specific gang problem, but the building of an organized capacity to deal with future similar problems and in the process contribute to the well being of the community.

Organizational Development and Change. This refers mainly to the efforts of the grassroots organization through its professional or citizen leaders and sometimes through mass participation to bring about change in the policies and practices of other organizations, often public agencies, to better control the gang problem. A key objective of the grassroots organization is also to hold other agencies accountable for policies and programs that are publicly mandated such as adequate school achievement for children and police protection. Organizational development may involve grassroots leadership in the creation of a network of agencies and community groups to more adequately coordinate their programs and services in relation to the problem.

Suppression. This represents a key set of activities to safeguard community citizens, particularly non-gang children, youth, and adults, as well as protect property from the criminal activities of gang members. It may involve the development of community patrols, block watches, adult supervision of community events, and coordinated action with police and other criminal justice agencies. It also calls on citizens to testify against gang members in court

and take a direct stand against gang members engaged in drug trafficking and other criminal activities.

Opportunities Provision. A key goal of a grassroots organization, particularly in socially deprived communities, is to advocate for and bring more social resources or programs into the community, particularly those which provide remedial education as well as jobs and job training to targeted gang or gang prone youth. Such opportunities should be provided through schools and community businesses. At times the grassroots organization itself may sponsor training, remedial education, and business projects which directly serve to educate and employ gang youth.

Social Intervention. The grassroots organization can also develop a series of mutual support and socializing activities which assist community residents to better understand and especially cope with the gang problem. This may occur through gang awareness campaigns, assisting victimized parents through group counseling to share their grief, and referrals of individuals and families to social agencies for various kinds of assistance related to the gang problem. The grassroots organization may directly sponsor youth and general community social activities which meet youth socialization needs, provide for inter gang conflict resolution, and through such events as community festivals foster solidarity among all elements of the community including gang members.

Grassroots Programming

The implementation of these strategies and objectives constitutes the work of the grassroots organization. Problems of organizing the community to reduce gang crime are likely to include a lack of information by citizens about the scope and seriousness of the problem, apathy or hopelessness about affecting change, personal deprivation and lack of agency resources, citizen group and interagency conflict, exploitation of the problem for political and organizational purposes, and lack of a well planned sustained program. Grassroots organizing requires confronting these issues by utilizing the strategies identified above.

Community Mobilization

Sufficient interest and concern must be expressed in regard to a series of gang violence or drug related situations. The problem should also be defined objectively and accurately to present a clear basis for a manageable program of action. Gang crime may not be a simple problem of law and order, but directly related in some communities to issues of race, economics, and organizational failures. It is often addressed in rhetorical, emotional, and politicized terms. Gang crime stirs passions of anger, indignation, fear, anxiety, and denial. The problem of gangs "hits very close to home" since many of the gang members are sons and

sometimes daughters of those complaining about the problem. It is extremely difficult for these reasons as well as the absence of solid data, including meaningful police statistics, to distinguish gang from non-gang crime, determine who the gangs and gang members are, their ages, motivations, and indeed whether they are from the immediate community.

A key objective of the grassroots organization should be to develop clear and reliable information about the problem and to propose that the community acting together can successfully combat it. Citizen testimony, media reports, and informed opinion should be sought out, and surveys conducted. Testimony should include that of the police, youth agency personnel, school officials, local citizens, and sometimes gang members or former gang members. There may be a lack of clarity about the nature of the problem in emerging gang problem cities because of changing racial and ethnic patterns, special organizational and political interests. The authorities, particularly the chief of police, may be reluctant to admit that a problem exists due to pressures from various business, school, or governmental sources which fear for their good name of their organization or administration. The police need to be encouraged, if not required, to develop a clear assessment of the problem based on reasonable, if not standard, definitions of such critical concepts as the gang, gang member, and gang incident.

The grassroots organization should be aggressive in its efforts to gather data, interpret the problem, and determine what should be done. This process tends to stir controversy and bring out conflicting perspectives. The police see the problem in more limited terms while youth agency representatives and local citizens view the problem as larger and more serious. The police usually focus on high profile older gang youth, while youth agency personnel and local citizens see more widespread intimidation and recruitment of younger children into gang delinquency. Local citizens emphasize problems of drug dealing and defacement of property with gang graffiti. The media provides graphic details of serious violent incidents. Gang youth or former gang youth usually focus on the need for more after school activities and better job opportunities. The difficulty of obtaining an accurate assessment may be further compounded by highly charged exchanges between parents who claim that their children are victimized by gangs at school and school officials who strongly deny that gangs or gang members are even present in the schools.

A series of community meetings should be supplemented by use of existing documents or analyses of the problem and the results of a commissioned survey of agency informants, parents, and students. The assessed scope, seriousness, and level of concern about the problem become a basis for planning in regard to control, intervention, or prevention of gang activities can occur. However, by the time an adequate assessment is completed interest and concern over the problem may have abated, particularly if no significant additional gang incidents occur. Local citizens may become frustrated and apathetic, while agencies, particularly the police, are content not to have to change their policies or

routines.

The leadership of the grassroots organization, however needs to keep the community "pot boiling" over the issue of gangs. It should use the information gathered during the assessment phase to develop a set of action objectives with a view to influencing certain key authorities to see the moral and political necessity of doing something about the problem in policy and programmatic terms. The grassroots organizers must be sensitive to a number of organizing issues: how concerned is the community with the problem; how resistive are authorities to changing their approach; and what are the incentives to, and the costs for not, addressing the problem. The grassroots organizer, whether staff worker or citizen leader, will have to devise specific steps to first get local citizens out to participate in a particular action; second, sustain interest and energies of the various persons or agencies concerned with the problem; and, third, develop a rational plan of community action which provides a clear connection between the problem and a proposed resolution for it.

Once plans and programs are established and operationalized to deal with the problem, various levels of conflict concerning the community group's actions or delivery of services may occur. Key problems of goal displacement and lack of program impact begin to be identified. A process of redefinition of the problem by staff and community participants and modified approaches need to be developed and implemented within a relatively short period of time. For example, a new set of actions, such as picketing drug traffickers or agencies that are not sufficiently active, may take place in a matter of days or weeks. On the other hand, a set of service arrangements for additional recreation or remedial programs for gang youth may require months to implement.

Factionalism may break out in due course since some agencies or groups have received funding to deal with the problem and others have not. Contending philosophies of approach may arise if the problem grows worse or takes a different form. Personal interests and ambitions of leaders within and outside the grassroots organization may clash. A common understanding and unified approach toward dealing with the problem may no longer exist, however the scope of the problem and the issues related to controlling and preventing it become more sharply defined. Issues of racism, leader corruption, and staff incompetence may be raised. Citizen feelings are aroused and agencies are concerned but community involvement may grow.

As a result of these pressures, a new round of neighborhood or community planning may occur. A larger set of actors may be drawn into consideration and analysis of the problem. At this time, the grassroots organizer needs to facilitate rational discussion, calm tempers, and explain the results of previous efforts. The problem of gang crime has now to be defined in more precise terms and more fundamental reasons discovered for why the gang problem is occurring in the neighborhood. A closer link between cause and desired program effect in relation to particular target groups has to evolve. The grassroots organizer and his concerned citizen

group has to begin to focus more sharply on key issues of opportunities provision, suppression, and community participation, e.g., more adequate schooling, job training, and jobs for specific groups of gang and gang prone youth; distrust between police and citizen groups has to be dissolved and specific procedures for collaboration with both police and probation need to be developed in regard to specific gang situations; and the hiring of more minority staff by the local outreach youth agency to establish more positive relationships with gang youth.

Organizational Development and Change

While grassroots organizers in emerging gang cities must advocate for a fuller recognition of the gang problem, they must in chronic problem cities concentrate on changing policies and enforcing the responsibilities of public and privately funded agencies to do a genuine job of achieving stated gang prevention, intervention, and control objectives. The strategy of organizational change and development by grassroots groups would appear to comprise two interrelated objectives: 1) bringing about change in the policies of other agencies to better achieve community protection of life and property, and 2) increasing attention to and programming for the needs of gang member or gang prone youth.

A variety of mechanisms, techniques and direct actions are available to the grassroots organization to affect change in established organizational policy and programs to hold them accountable to perform mandated or agreed upon functions. The grassroots organization may utilize existing interorganizational mechanisms. For example, interagency task forces, coordinating council and advisory committees may facilitate contacts and the sharing of information about gangs with a whole range of criminal justice, community-based agencies, and grassroots organizations. The grassroots organization should be adept in the development and use of these community wide associations or advisory groups to educate and persuade agencies in regard to gang problems, and also to monitor and test the value of their programs and activities.

Organizational development and change is a strategy which can be employed to directly challenge and pressure agencies to change policies and practices in dealing with the gang problem. Militant action can be taken through the media, protest marches, and petitions to legislators or government leaders to either develop or curtail programs. The strategy can also be employed more subtly through processes of agency interaction, collaboration, and mutual education to better attend to the interests and needs of gang youth and the community in the face of increased gang violence and crime.

On the other hand, even non-local agencies can be prime movers. Organizational development can be induced by established agencies as well as local community groups through interagency meetings and workshops. Thus, a local community-based youth agency, an established multi functional agency or even a public organization such as a school or a child welfare agency with strong

concern for the welfare of a particular community can reach out to and encourage other agencies and community groups to better deal with the youth gang problem. Certain pro-active agency administrators can take upon themselves significant local community organizing functions.

An important consequence or effect of these organizing efforts should be leadership development of local citizens and of agency staff as they confront the gang problem over time. A variety of organizing and management skills can be learned such as how to efficiently marshall pickets or persuade local legislators to vote for or against a particular gang-related measure and how to conduct meetings, interagency negotiations, and arrange cooperative agreements.

Agency advocates or community activists, however, can be manipulative and self-serving, concerned more with achieving greater organizational power and personal influence than creating effective policy toward ameliorating or resolving gang problems. Interagency task forces and meetings can serve ceremonial purposes in which participants avoid coming to grips with defective agency programs. In addition, powerful agency interests can capture these coordinating bodies and attract funds to sustain their existing programs which are either ineffective or deliberately avoid targeting hard core or committed gang youth.

Grassroots organizers require an extraordinary degree of integrity and commitment to the development of programs that are truly effective. Policy and practice demand a complex understanding of the gang problem along with commitment to testing the value of approaches and programs used in as objective and scientific manner as possible. In other words, the grassroots organization, itself must be held accountable for the means to and the ends sought in resolution of gang problems, just as it holds other agencies and community groups accountable. The interagency task force or advisory group mechanism when democratically devised and implemented is especially important to the maintenance and integrity of the organizational change and program development process.

Suppression

Suppression is the strategy of directly controlling or making the gang youth accountable for criminal gang behavior or preventing it from re-occurring especially in high risk situations. A variety of means are available to implement this strategy including arrest, prosecution, detention, imprisonment, different levels of supervision, persuasion or counseling, community service, and various monitoring or surveillance procedures. Controls can be imposed through formal means or sanctioned authority, e.g., by police, principal, or employers, or through traditional or communal authority, e.g., by parents, neighborhood adults, and even gang leaders or senior gang members. Controls can also be imposed externally by others, such as adults or peers, or by the gang member himself. In either case, the youth has to be persuaded that

negative consequences will follow a particular behavior and that alternate conventional or acceptable behavior is preferable.

A variety of forms of control must be imposed on gang youth under appropriate circumstances. Informal or local neighborhood authority and influence, however, may be especially potent. It may have a superior value to formally imposed control by outside authority, since it is "closer to home", more routine and therefore more conducive to socialization of youth and their internalization of acceptable norms and values over the long term. Informal legitimate controls imposed by local adults and youth can become part of daily routine. These controls are more consistent and pervasive, and often more immediate in their impact should the youth attempt to commit a deviant or criminal act.

The neighborhood organization is in a uniquely advantageous position because it can mobilize street level informal controls over gang youth through its network of grassroots contacts including block clubs, mother's groups, influential neighborhood adults, and even gang members themselves. Furthermore, because of its contacts with official agents of control, particularly police and other justice system representatives, the neighborhood organization can mobilize targeted and efficient use of external controls against particular gang youth. Multi-functional neighborhood organizations with strong ties outside as well as inside the gang problem community are particularly well structured to assist in the integration of these different forms of control.

Local efforts to control or suppress the criminal activities of gang youth often occur quickly and spontaneously. Neighbors, local business people, church representatives, parents of gang youth or parents of victims may decide to react with a show of force. A citizen group can be formed for defensive or even offensive purposes. Some of these groups can assume a vigilante character and attempt to use counter intimidation to drive these groups, particularly drug traffickers who may be gang-related, out of the particular street or neighborhood. Guardian Angels, Muslim anti-drug patrols and some neighborhood groups may use tactics that are open to question from a civil liberties perspective.

More common and less controversial are the efforts of local parents, residents, and former gang youth, collectively or individually, to persuade and counsel gang youth to cease their violent activities. Some of these local neighborhood efforts may take the form of protest marches, patrols, and parades through the neighborhood. In some instances, mother's groups have interposed themselves between gang factions ready to fight, insisting that bullets would have to fly through their bodies first. Mother's or neighborhood groups have also mediated gang conflicts. Gang leaders have been known, for a variety of reasons, to "cool out" hot-head gang members and successfully prevent or mediate conflicts between members of opposing gangs.

Perhaps most effective have been joint efforts by representatives of criminal justice and local agencies, and neighborhood groups together to impose controls on gang youth. These agencies and groups may meet together with representatives of

opposing gangs to resolve an intergang conflict. Parents of students may join with school security guards to patrol school hallways or the streets near the school at dismissal time. The police may join with or even mobilize local citizens to develop evening street patrols and supervise community events. Local citizen groups may be equipped with walkie talkies, instructed and supervised by the police. Youth patrols containing gang members have also been used by police at times of urban unrest and rioting. Businessmen's associations have employed gang members to maintain security during community festivals, while also using police patrols.

Some of these efforts by local organizations to suppress gang activity are probably superior to others in given situations. The most effective use of indigenous or grassroots authority occurs when norms, values, and motivations are consistent with those of formal authority. The use of gang members to impose control in a gang situation may be questioned when short-term situational peace and stability may be sacrificed to the creation of long-term gang criminal interest and power. This is particularly likely to occur at times of prison riot or urban disorder. However, the extensive or exclusive use of a strategy of suppression may be insufficient to deal with basic causes of the gang problem, whether through the imposition of controls by formal external authority or informal neighborhood means. Other strategies are required to deal with these generating conditions of the problem.

Opportunities Provision

Youth gangs are a response to the lack of basic social opportunities available to certain youth necessary to achieve success goals in deprived, often socially disorganized, environments. Youth gangs and their criminal behavior may be viewed as alternative means to achieve desired status, if not survive in a hostile environment. The provision of social opportunities is a critically important strategy particularly in chronic gang problem communities. Local organizing devices, advocacy tactics, and the imposition of various levels of control may still be insufficient to deter gang youth from criminal gang activity to achieve status. Alternate routes to social status and personal satisfaction are required. Substitute conventional means to social and economic gain over the long-term need to be provided.

Local grassroots organizations have limited resources. They are ordinarily not established to directly provide education, training, and jobs to gang youth. However, community mobilization and advocacy can be instrumental in changing policies of large public organizations, private industry and schools to make available the resources and means needed by these organizations to better target gang youth for status, remedial education, training and jobs. Grassroots organizations, nevertheless, have, from time to time, sponsored alternative schools, remedial education, job training, and small business projects which provide opportunities to gang youth. Some of these projects have been joint projects

with established educational institutions, businesses and industries.

The local grassroots organization, whether a multi-functional organization, church, or small neighborhood organization can be a base or setting for a store front learning academy for gang youth, providing them with access to remedial basic education, special vocational training, and contacts with friendly instructors that can culminate in GED certificates or even jobs. Grassroots organizations have obtained grants from public agencies to prepare and train gang youth for specific occupations. Special apprenticeship positions with local neighborhood business and industry have been arranged. A variety of temporary and paraprofessional positions in these organizations have sometimes been provided to individual gang or former gang youth through which certain attitudes, skills, and routines are learned and later become useful in finding full time employment.

Grassroots sponsored training and employment programs are sometimes limited because of their poor organization and temporary character. They may become stop-gap programs that lead nowhere. On the other hand they may be so tightly managed and controlled, because of external funding requirements, that only the best candidates are selected to participate, and high rates of graduation or job placement can be reported. A "creaming" process occurs in which youth, with high risk of program failure are excluded. Often programs established to target inner city youth, such as gang members, fail because entry criteria are so strict and support services so weak that, in effect, the basic objectives of reaching and training marginal youth are not achieved.

From a long-term policy perspective, the neighborhood organization should probably play a minimal role in the direct provision of basic academic and economic opportunities for gang youth. The grassroots organization should not be a significant residual opportunity system. Rather, the key task of grassroots organizations should be mobilization, networking, and advocacy so that schools, employers, and government appropriately target and prepare gang prone and gang member youth for academic success and meaningful adult vocational roles.

Social Intervention

The grassroots organization ordinarily does not stress social intervention as a primary strategy, however it does provide information about social services and sometimes referral to various specialized agencies and resources in the general community. The local community organization does not, as a rule, provide individual or family counseling services. Nevertheless, the development of direct social support and individual service projects related to the gang problem may occur and may have some positive value. Individual parents seeking advice on what to do about a child who is a gang member may be referred by grassroots or local agency staff to a counseling or family treatment agency. Should several parents request assistance in regard to the gang

problem, a mutual support group may be formed. Such groups sometimes develop into social action or advocacy organizations.

More often, local residents will persuade the local community organization to develop an activity program for gang or gang prone youth to keep them out of trouble. The programs that develop tend to be after school or summer time programs centered around recreational activities, trips, sports, and camping. They are often directed to younger youth and are viewed as serving a preventive function. Some of the programs are poorly conceived and poorly implemented. Church organizations, for example, may use such programs as a way of protecting "good" kids and excluding "bad" ones, further alienating gang youth. On the other hand, a local organization or agency may simply be a gathering place for gang youths and even serve, unintentionally, to cohere gangs.

Local organizations may expend energy and resources to celebrate certain festivals or social events and conduct graffiti expunging or mural projects. These and other activities may involve gang youth. To the extent that adult interaction and supervision are provided and youth derive some sense of belonging and legitimate status, these locally sponsored activities may have some value. They need to be interrelated, however, with more significant, longer effect experiences. Other key institutions such as schools, youth agencies, as well as the family should be engaged in collaborative efforts to follow through and meet more basic social needs of gang prone and gang member youth. However, to the extent that a basic solidarity with adults in the community and sense of common legitimate purpose develops, these activities may serve some gang control and preventive purpose.

Staff Selection and Training

Leadership and staffing of grassroots organizations are often precarious. Sometimes motivation is high, sometimes it is not. The level of knowledge about effective community organizing or gang issues may be limited. Community volunteers may have considerable energy and talent to bring to various gang control and prevention tasks they may have personal and social needs which require considerable attention. Participants in the community projects are usually self-selected. Especially important, therefore, is screening of volunteers and their participation in specific manageable projects which are of interest and satisfying to them and in which they will make the most significant contribution toward reducing gang crime.

The needs for training of staff and volunteers in regard to gang-related projects can be extensive depending on the particular tasks required. Staff and volunteers should develop a common understanding of the key characteristics of a gang, gang member, and gang incident. Special attention should be directed to the genesis of gang problems and the extent to which community conditions contribute to the problem. Techniques for working with gang youth, their parents, and community agencies dealing with various aspects of the problem should be covered.

Staff or supervisors will require special instruction in how they or volunteers can avoid mistakes in planning, programming, and relationships when dealing with gang youth or the gang problem. Issues of developing interest and resources to support certain gang-related projects, administration of funds and evaluating project efforts are important. Trainers for volunteers or staff should probably come from various sources, including police, schools, and youth agencies as well as board and senior staff of the grassroots organization. Workshops and short-term conferences are usually the most efficient way to train staff and community volunteers.

Evaluation

A variety of indicators are ordinarily required to determine whether grassroots projects are effective. The number of people who participate in an activity should be a chief interest. It is important to determine whether gang problem rates go up or down or change after a period of community action. Organizers should obtain aggregate police reports of incidents of crime, particularly gang related crime, on a regular monthly basis and chart changes in patterns. This will serve not only evaluation but also planning purposes for the next round of grassroots efforts. A full scale or valid evaluation of the community organization's contribution to gang crime reduction is probably not possible, except with cross neighborhood comparisons and careful research controls on a large number of variables over time. However, documentation of organizing efforts and particular activities and their accompanying results would appear to be of significant reporting and analysis value.