



National Gang Center

Fall 2015 Newsletter

Diagnosing Your Community's Gang Problem: Avoid the Kitchen Sink Approach

By: Charles M. Katz, Ph.D., Professor of Criminology and Criminal Justice
Watts Family Director, Center for Violence Prevention & Community Safety
Arizona State University

Lidia E. Nuño, M.S.

Center for Violence Prevention & Community Safety, Arizona State University

To build safer communities, organizations addressing the problem of violence need to determine whether their community has a gang problem, and, if so, the size or magnitude of the problem as well as the nature of the problem. The process of making this determination has come to be known as a gang assessment. As community groups and violence-reduction task forces consider implementing formal gang assessments, they need to determine the type of information or data that will help them determine the existence, magnitude, and nature of the gang problem. With the completion of this assessment, community stakeholders need to consider how the information produced will be used.

The starting point of a gang assessment is building an inventory of data needs that can be used to gauge and understand the problem. The inventory of data sources often includes community demographic data, school data, community perceptions data, and data obtained from criminal justice agencies, most commonly law enforcement agencies. Community demographic data provides relevant background information on the community, including sociodemographic data and an examination of changes or trends in that data over time.

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Law enforcement data includes information on the definition of gang membership, gangs, and gang crime and provides descriptive information about gangs, gang members, and gang crime in the community. It also can include information about the locations of gang crime and when it is being committed as well as information about the suspects and victims of gang crime. Student and school data provides information on the characteristics of schools, the scope and nature of student misconduct, the scope and nature of the gang problem in schools, risk and protective factors associated with gang joining, and student perceptions about gangs. Community perceptions data includes information from key stakeholders (i.e., parents, community members, gang members, criminal justice officials, nongovernmental organizations) related to their perceptions of the gang problem and their preferences for responding to the problem. Communities and violence-prevention organizations engaged in gang assessments are faced with the problem of making sure that their inventories include all of the essential data required for an effective assessment while at the same time making sure that the data elements included are necessary and will actually be useful in determining and analyzing their gang problem as well as planning their response to the problem. Care needs to be taken to avoid “kitchen sink” approaches in which data is gathered simply because it is available and not because it is essential and useful. Cluttering the gang assessment landscape with too much data and unnecessary data is a major impediment to producing a clear picture of a community's gang problem. Fortunately, over the past several years, gang assessment guides have been developed that provide detailed information on the organization, use, and reporting of assessment data. For example, one guide that has been most relied on is the Office of Juvenile and Delinquency Prevention's (OJJDP) “Guide to Assessing Your Community's Youth Gang Problem,” which provides detailed information on the use and reporting of assessment data. A brief review of prior reports

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using this guide (e.g., 2010 Fairbanks, Alaska, Gang Assessment; 2012 Yakima County, Washington, Gang Assessment; 2015 Tri-Cities, Washington, Gang Assessment; 2010 Guilford County, North Carolina, Gang Assessment; 2014 Multnomah County, Oregon, Comprehensive Gang Assessment) suggests that OJJDP's assessment guide has been extensively used.

OJJDP's assessment guide has had a tremendous impact on researchers, policymakers, public safety agencies, and community organizations' conceptualization of the local gang problem. One of the many benefits of the guide is that it provides a comprehensive methodology, while at the same time maintaining simplicity—with the scope and depth of the assessment being limited only by the time and resources available. These characteristics make OJJDP's guidebook a “go-to” resource for conducting gang assessments.

Care needs to be taken to avoid “kitchen sink” approaches in which data is gathered simply because it is available and not because it is essential and useful. Cluttering the gang assessment landscape with too much data and unnecessary data is a major impediment to producing a clear picture of a community's gang problem.

Potential users of the guidebook should be aware, however, that completing the recommended measurable activities will not be the only steps necessary to complete a “bias-free” and deliberate assessment of a community's gang environment. The guidebook does not provide prescriptive thresholds for determining whether or not your community has a gang problem. What a gang problem is to some people may not be a problem to others, and different groups might have different perceptions of the problem. The function of a gang assessment, in addition to determining the current state of the community's gang problem, is to help the community determine whether the problem exceeds the community's tolerance for the problem. It provides the community with a common base of knowledge to help develop a consensus about the problem and whether it warrants a particular response. Therefore, it is essential for community stakeholders to determine whether the assessment results rise to the level of concern appropriate for their community.

While the OJJDP guidance provides overall direction in completing a comprehensive gang assessment, it is also important for community stakeholders to understand the importance of putting the assessment outcomes into a synthesized report format. A goal of any good assessment is to transmit the report findings, potential resources, and community gaps in such a way that policymakers can clearly understand the implications of the findings and how resources should be organized to target the local gang problem. Minimally, and assuming that the assessment determines that a community has a gang problem, the results of the assessment can be organized into two major categories. The first category includes those factors associated with the gang problem that are immediate and more readily susceptible or responsive in the short term to prevention and intervention programming. These factors stand in contrast to gang-related factors in the second category: those that are more deeply rooted in the community, are more challenging to address, and require long-term solutions. An example of the first category is a situation in which youth are threatened by violence in their neighborhood and join a gang for protection, or in which there is retaliatory gun violence between

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two gangs in a dispute over turf. Consideration of these near-term factors related to gang joining and gang violence allows policymakers to directly focus resources on the immediate cause of a problem. For example, increasing the responsiveness to bullied youth in some neighborhoods and schools where there are escalating levels of violence might help prevent some youth from joining a gang. Responding to the more immediate factors identified by the assessment is often easier and faster. Perhaps more important, there are evidence-based practices indicating that responding to these immediate factors is effective in reducing gang violence. *The Office of Community Oriented Policing Services' Strategies to Address Gang Crime: A Guidebook for Local Law Enforcement* provides policymakers with a step-by-step model for taking a problem-oriented approach to responding to gangs, an approach that has been repeatedly found to be successful.

Identifying the more deeply rooted factors associated with gang formation and violence requires acquiring data on neighborhood and community characteristics that result in the criminogenic environments fostering crime and delinquency in general and gang formation specifically. An assessment might identify economic conditions, housing, and family and social disorganization as some of the underlying factors responsible for producing such criminogenic environments. Altering or eliminating such environments requires strategies that reflect longer-term solutions involving stakeholders from a broad array of sectors including local, state, and federal agencies as well as nongovernmental organizations and the faith-based community. Such strategies typically involve major realignments of policies and budgetary resources; however, evidence-based programs such as the "Communities That Care Model" (<http://www.communitiesthatcare.net/>), a public health prevention approach, organize and facilitate interventions that address more deeply rooted factors at the neighborhood, family, and school levels.

Gang assessments are essential for addressing the problem of gang-related violence. Gang assessment tools are readily available for use by communities and organizations to help determine whether a community has a gang problem and, if so, the magnitude and nature of the problem. An effective gang assessment should avoid data clutter, that is, avoid collecting unnecessary data, and the assessment should provide a thorough diagnosis of the problem by identifying and distinguishing those factors that lead to near-term solutions for reducing gang violence from those requiring longer-term solutions. Most important, gang assessments should be seen and used as the starting point for developing effective near- and long-term anti-gang strategies.

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Promoting Adolescent Behavioral Adjustment in Violent Neighborhoods: Supportive Families Can Make a Difference!

By: Lorraine McKelvey, Ph.D., Associate Professor,
University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences

It was recently documented that nearly two out of every three children in the United States have witnessed or been victims of violence in their homes, schools, or communities. That's a staggering statistic when we consider the well-established link between children's exposure to stress and their long-term mental and physical health outcomes. Researchers at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences have found that family interactions can serve as a buffer for children's development when they live in risky neighborhoods. More than 700 families living in eight U.S. cities (Little Rock, Arkansas; Bronx, New York; Cambridge, Massachusetts; Miami, Florida; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Dallas, Texas; Seattle, Washington; and New Haven, Connecticut) were interviewed as part of a project examining the long-term effects of an intervention for low-birth-weight, pre-term infants. Respondents answered questions on the characteristics of their families, neighborhoods, and children at multiple points from the children's birth until the children were 18 years old.

Lorraine McKelvey and her colleagues found that living in violent communities during childhood has negative effects on later psychosocial functioning, but that this effect differs based on gender and levels of family cohesion. For example, for male children who grow up in violent communities, they found that having high levels of family cohesion is protective for psychosocial well-being (internalizing and externalizing problems)

when children were 18 years old. Unfortunately, this protective influence of the family was not found for girls, for whom any risk experienced (less family cohesion or greater neighborhood violence) resulted in greater behavior problems in adolescence. McKelvey hopes that these findings will encourage researchers and practitioners to focus attention on supportive family relationships earlier in development and to further investigate means for supporting girls who grow up in violent communities.

Lorraine McKelvey can be reached at mckelveylorraine@uams.edu.

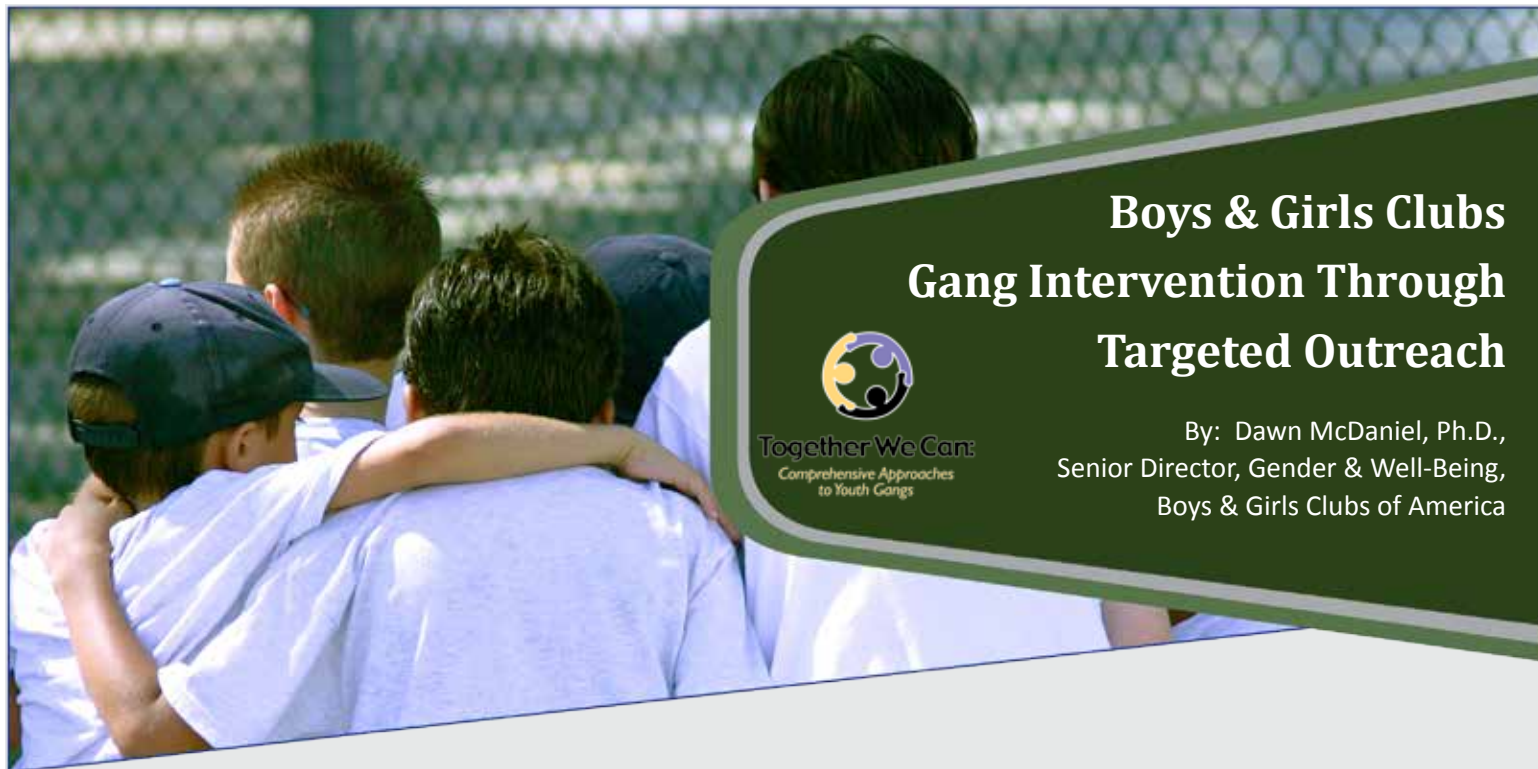
Source:

McKelvey, Lorraine, Nicola A. Conners-Burrow, Glenn Mesman, Joy Pemberton, and Patrick Casey. 2015. *Promoting Adolescent Behavioral Adjustment in Violent Neighborhoods: Supportive Families Can Make a Difference!* *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology*, 44(1), 157–168.



The Gang Resistance
Education And
Training (G.R.E.A.T.)

Families program is a research-based, family-strengthening program designed to foster positive relationships, improve cohesion, and provide community assistance resources. The six facilitated sessions for children aged 10–14 and their parents/guardians are formulated to enhance positive behaviors and promote healthy family development. For more information, visit <https://www.great-online.org/Home/About/Families>.



Boys & Girls Clubs Gang Intervention Through Targeted Outreach



Together We Can:
Comprehensive Approaches
to Youth Gangs

By: Dawn McDaniel, Ph.D.,
Senior Director, Gender & Well-Being,
Boys & Girls Clubs of America

*Results from a 1997
evaluation by Public/
Private Ventures found that
more frequent attendance
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Through Targeted Outreach
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Boys & Girls Clubs of America (BGCA) is the largest network of place-based youth development organizations. Many Clubs serve youth in communities with gang problems. These Clubs play a critical role in maintaining healthy and safe communities by offering youth prosocial opportunities ranging from informal recreational activities to intensive supportive services.

With funding and support from the Office of Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), BGCA has offered the [Gang Intervention Through Targeted Outreach](#) initiative since the early 1990s. This initiative has four components:

Community assessment/mobilization: A Club conducts a community assets and needs assessment when it begins to implement the initiative. This assessment process helps identify key stakeholders, define the gang problem, and better understand conditions that mitigate and exacerbate the gang problem. After stakeholders come to a shared understanding of the gang problem in their community, the next step is community mobilization. Either through a new or existing task force, community and Club leaders collaborate to design a strategy to prevent gang involvement.

Recruitment: Through collaborations with law enforcement, probation, foster care, mental health agencies, schools, and other community-based organizations, Clubs develop a referral network to recruit gang-affiliated youth into the Boys & Girls Club.

Programming: Once in the Boys & Girls Club, youth participate in programs based on their interests and needs. Clubs offer evidence-based programs, such as Project Learn or SMART Leaders, and other prevention programs that may target topics such as gang awareness, conflict resolution, and bullying prevention.

Case management: Case management includes monthly assessments of the youth in four domains: law enforcement/juvenile justice, school, family, and Club. Case-management contacts provide an opportunity to examine behavioral changes, particularly as related to gang affiliation, contact with the juvenile justice system, and school performance.

Boys & Girls Clubs Gang Intervention Through Targeted Outreach

Results from a 1997 evaluation by Public/Private Ventures found that more frequent attendance among youth participating in Gang Intervention Through Targeted Outreach was associated with disengagement from gang-associated behaviors and peers. In particular, the youth were less likely to wear gang colors, steal with gang members, flash gang signals, hang out in the same places as gang members, and be victims of gang attacks. Additionally, these youth had less contact with the juvenile justice system and more positive school engagement. The National Gang Center, Crimesolutions.gov, and the Model Programs Guide lists Gang Intervention Through Targeted Outreach as a “promising” program.

Spotlight—Boys & Girls Clubs of King County: A Community Collaborates to Prevent Gang Violence

The teen center of the [Boys & Girls Clubs of King County](http://BoysandGirlsClubs.org) temporarily closed in December 2010. At that time, the Rainier Beach community, with a long history of gang and crime problems, was very concerned about the safety of its youth. After the teen center reopened in September 2013, key community stakeholders, including Club leaders, came together to discuss the safety issues in their community. To perform a community assessment, this group examined law enforcement data and saw several hot spots for violent offenses around four area schools. Law enforcement officers had attempted to respond to these incidents, but their reactive approach was not addressing the root of the problem. When interviewed about this situation, Marty Jackson of the Boys & Girls Clubs of King County said, “We didn’t want our young people to get arrested if there is something preventative that we could do.”

Marty Jackson of the Boys & Girls Clubs of King County said, “We didn’t want our young people to get arrested if there is something preventative that we could do.”

Through community mobilization efforts, the community identified a shared vision of being proactive in its approach and preventing violence before it occurs. A community member suggested focusing on creating safe passages around the schools. This strategy required collaboration among the Boys & Girls Clubs of King County, schools, law enforcement, and members of the Seattle Youth Violence Prevention Initiative. The group formed a task force to address the high incidence of youth violence in the community and began piloting the Safe Passage program in March 2015. The Safe Passage pilot program positions a trusted member of the community along routes that children take home from school to guide them. This ensures that children go directly home instead of stopping on street corners to participate in activities that could lead to trouble. Since this program began, the community has seen a 40 percent drop in crime in the southeast Seattle area.

For a video on the Safe Passage program, see:

<http://www.seattlechannel.org/OurCityOurSchools?videoid=x57742>

This work was supported by OJJDP-2014-3853 National Mentoring Programs, Gang Intervention grant.





In Memory of: Glen David Curry

By: Scott H. Decker, Ph.D., Foundation
Professor, School of Criminology and
Criminal Justice, Arizona State University

Our friend Dave Curry passed on April 27, 2015. Dave was a giant in the field of gang research and programming. Throughout his career, he remained committed to improving the lives of children and ensuring justice. His life work demonstrates those commitments.



Dave was born in West Virginia. His father was a coal miner whose family traveled the South looking for work when the mines played out. He was an exceptional student who was sent to community college at sixteen and transferred to the University of Southern Mississippi, where he earned his Bachelor's degree in 1969. He served in Vietnam and left the service as a captain. He then earned a Master's degree in Sociology from the University of Mississippi and a Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of Chicago. He later returned to the University of Chicago to complete a postdoctoral fellowship in evaluation research methods. Dave was one smart guy.

Dave is, of course, best known for his research on gangs. He received grants from the Administration on Children, Youth and Families; the National Institute of Justice; the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention; the State of Illinois; and the St. Louis Mental Health Board, among others. All of these grants were collaborative, which meant working with agencies providing direct services to youth. Sometimes, those agencies were police departments or the juvenile court; in other instances, they were schools, counseling agencies, drug treatment centers, or recreation groups.

Dave's responsibility in most of these projects was to design data systems, make sure that the right data was collected, and complete the analyses. The people involved with the projects—the kids, the cops, the probation officers, and the counselors—all loved him. He had a funny, unassuming way that made people feel at ease. That is certainly a rare quality in an academic, especially one whose first love is “data.”

We were several months into an evaluation of the Juvenile Accountability Incentive Block Grant (JAIBG) program in St. Louis. Dave had designed a data system that allowed all the agencies to enter the data on clients from their own locations and to see what other services were and how well their own clients were doing at other agencies. The beta test was successful, and we phased the system in across nine different agencies. Two days of group training were followed by hands-on technical assistance provided by Dave. At the end of the first two-week data

In Memory of: Glen David Curry

collection period, we began receiving client tracking information online. We were a little flabbergasted to receive a phone call from one of the “star” agencies telling us that even though employees had uploaded the data to the server and we had confirmed receipt, they were going to drop off hard copy so they could be sure we had the correct information. Dave was even patient with them.

People at the National Gang Center (NGC) knew Dave for his work on the National Youth Gang Survey (NYGS). Arlen Egley was his first Ph.D. student at the University of Missouri–St. Louis and learned a good deal from Dave about how to construct a survey, collect the data, and prepare the results. But what Arlen probably learned most was how to do things in a way that did not ruffle feathers. That does not mean that Dave was unwilling to dig his heels in and fight when there was an important point to be made. Many times, he politely told another researcher that he or she was flat-out wrong; he was more gentle with the practitioners. The NYGS would not have been as successful as it was without Dave’s input, much of which was based on what he learned from working with Irving Spergel. Dave worked well with Mac Klein, Cheryl Maxson, Chuck Katz, John Moore, and Buddy Howell.

Dave never lost sight of the fact that the most important job was to do things that made the lives of children better. The world was a better place when he was in it. We miss him.

Spotlight—Glen David Curry, Career and Publication Highlights

Professor emeritus, Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice, University of Missouri–St. Louis, St. Louis, Missouri, 1994–2015.

Project director, National Gang Intervention and Suppression Project, and lecturer (Regression and Analysis of Variance), School of Social Service Administration, University of Chicago, 1988–1989.

National Institute of Mental Health postdoctoral fellow, University of Chicago, 1986–1987.

U.S. Army (highest rank: captain, honorable discharge, Vietnam service (1971–1972)), 1969–1972.

Hattiesburg American Legion Award for Military Excellence in Senior Cadet, 1969.

Publications

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Using the Developmental Perspective to Better Serve Youth

What is the developmental perspective?

You may have heard a lot about the developmental perspective lately. It is not a new idea by any means, but it has gained traction in the last few years with policymakers and practitioners who are acknowledging that juveniles should not be treated like adults. Experts assert that if we want to ensure public safety and promote positive outcomes for at-risk youth, including delinquent and gang-involved youth, we need to change our focus from punishment to rehabilitation, positive development, and accountability.

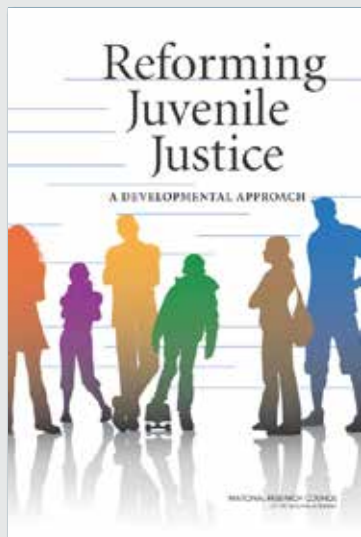
What can be learned from the developmental perspective?

The National Research Council recently released the book *Reforming Juvenile Justice: A Developmental Approach*,* which draws on decades of neuroscience and social behavioral research to outline how those who work with young people can better serve them by understanding the unique ways in which their minds and bodies are developing. Most important, research shows that the part of the brain that involves emotional regulation, impulse control, and judgement does not fully develop until about the age of 24.

How can the developmental perspective be incorporated into practice?

While the hope is that the developmental perspective will be used to inform juvenile justice policy reform, which will subsequently affect practice, there are things practitioners can do today to better serve youth. First, remember that youth have a more difficult time than adults making sound decisions and resisting impulses. Respond to their behavior based on this knowledge as well as on each youth's unique challenges and strengths. Second, work to build trust with youth. Part of a youth's developmental process is forming opinions about law enforcement officers and other authority figures. Help youth form positive opinions by treating them fairly.

Using the Developmental Perspective to Better Serve Youth



Third, whenever it is safe and feasible, opt for treatment and rehabilitation over punishment (especially confinement). Finally, engage each youth's family and help foster a positive environment. The family will be there long after you stop working with the youth, and their involvement could be very beneficial.

*Available to download at

<http://www.nap.edu/catalog/14685/reforming-juvenile-justice-a-developmental-approach>.

Project Highlight—Violence Reduction Network

The Violence Reduction Network (VRN) is an innovative approach to support and enhance local violence reduction efforts. The VRN is a collaborative initiative between the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) and a consortium of cities. The VRN builds on efforts already under way, leverages lessons learned, and delivers a broad spectrum of resources via a strategic and holistic approach.

Recently, the VRN provided the Webinar “Utilizing Social Network Analysis to Reduce Violent Crime.” This Webinar explores how social network analysis (SNA) can be used to understand and guide gun violence prevention efforts. The Webinar covers the basics of SNA, with the aim of providing a foundation for understanding how mapping human social networks can be used to better address violent crime. It focuses on the use of law enforcement agency record information to examine social ties, such as when suspects are arrested together or are linked for having been mentioned in the same field interview stop. These official ties are used to illustrate the utility of SNA.

To view this Webinar or other VRN Webinars, visit: <https://www.vrnetwork.org/Home/ItemsOfInterest/VRNWebinars>.

For more information on the VRN, visit: <https://www.vrnetwork.org/Home>.

For domain-specific resources, such as gang violence, crime prevention, officer safety, and many more, visit: <https://www.vrnetwork.org/Home/Resources>.





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NATIONAL GANG CENTER

Post Office Box 12729
Tallahassee, Florida 32317

Phone: (850) 385-0600

Fax: (850) 386-5356

E-Mail:

information@nationalgangcenter.gov

Web Site:

www.nationalgangcenter.gov



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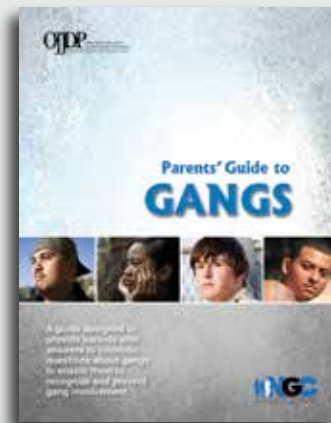
What's New? Parents' Guide to Gangs Is Now UPDATED!

In late 2006, the NGC created a resource guide titled "Parents' Guide to Gangs."

This guide was designed to provide parents with answers to common questions about gangs to enable them to recognize and prevent gang involvement. Since its inception, it has been one of the NGC's most popular resources.

The NGC recently published an updated version, and it has already received positive feedback from numerous communities across the United States. To download the "Parents' Guide to Gangs," visit:

<http://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/Content/Documents/Parents-Guide-to-Gangs.pdf>.



About the National Gang Center

The National Gang Center (NGC) is jointly funded by the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and the Bureau of Justice Assistance. The NGC conducts research on street gangs and serves as a clearinghouse for individuals and agencies seeking information, technical assistance, and training in the areas of gang prevention, intervention, suppression, and reentry.

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