

'Wannabes' or 'Youth Gangs' A Case Study of Hamilton Youth

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Social Well-being

Background

- 2005/06 youth gangs politicised, publicised and sensationalised
- 2006 – Community meetings
- South Auckland Research (MSD, 2006)
- 2006 Social Well-being Strategy Leadership forum and formation of Hamilton Youth Sub-Culture Working Party
- Research proposal submitted in March 2007

Research Aims

- Collect descriptive information about Hamilton youth gangs
- To identify gaps in services provided for Hamilton youth
- To generate recommendations for interventions that target youth gang criminality

Research Questions



- Nature and prevalence of youth gangs?
- Why do youth participate in gangs?
- What existing interventions currently target youth gang members?
- Are there gaps in service provision?
- What are appropriate interventions?

Research Methods

- Literature review of academic literature on youth gangs
- Media analysis
- Quantitative analysis profiling Hamilton communities (Census data)
- Qualitative analysis – interviews and focus groups
- Services mapping

Table 1: Summary of Participant Information

Group	Method	No.	Information
Service providers, community groups, government agencies	Individual interviews	37	Why young people join gangs; solutions
Youth gang members (10 different gangs)	Individual interviews	21	Reasons for joining; alternatives; solutions
Non-gang youth (16 – 18yrs)	Focus groups (4)	33	Protective factors
Non-gang youth (9 – 12 yrs)	Focus groups (3)	28	Early risk factors

Definitional Issues

- No agreed definition
- Lack of quantifiable data
- Youth gangs diverse and constantly changing
- Difficult to define characteristics
- The term 'gang' stirs up reaction
- Can be applied indiscriminately to groups of youth
- Media exploitation of gang culture
- Globalisation and moral panic

Youth Gangs in Hamilton

Research identified presence of groups:

“.. of youths, often from disadvantaged background, with a loose structure, a common identifier (colours, a name, hand signals etc), whose activities are not primarily criminal but involve (mostly) petty crimes, and who see themselves as a gang and are indentified as such by others in the community” (MSD, 2006)

Categories of 'Youth Gangs'

MSD research also classified the groups into the following four categories:	
Wannabes	<p>Not gang members (but perceived to be by the community)</p> <p>Shared hand signs and similar dress code</p> <p>Collectives of youth or groups of friends</p> <p>May engage in petty crime</p>
Territorial Gangs	<p>More organised than wannabe groups</p> <p>Sense of ownership of a particular geographical location or territory</p> <p>Violence can be an issue when other gangs enter their territory</p>
Unaffiliated Criminal Youth Gangs	<p>May also engage in opportunistic petty crime</p> <p>Highly organised and group together with the intent to commit crime.</p>
Affiliated Criminal Youth Gangs	<p>Same as the above classification except that it involves an affiliation to an adult gang.</p>

Hamilton Youth Gangs

- Specific numbers and size of youth gangs unknown (see next slide)
- Mongrel mob appear to have a strong influence on youth gangs in Hamilton
- Gangsta rap contributes to popularisation
- Members engage in activities harmful to themselves and others (fighting; drug and alcohol abuse; petty crime)

Gangs identified by Research Participants

Fifteen Youth Gangs were named by Research Participants (but key informant participants estimate that there are approximately 25 youth gangs in Hamilton City)

West Side Outlaws (WSO)	Mongrel Mob	Waikato Crips
East Side Crips	Gangster Crip Family (GFC's or GC's)	Criminal (C-Squad)
Front Line Soldiers (FLS)	Represent Fairfiled (RFF)	East Side Bloodz
Strictly Bloodz	Bloodz	West Side Bloodz (WSB's)
Te Rapa Bloodz (TRB's)	Youth Black Power (YBP's)	East Side Cobras

Why Young People Join Gangs

- Response to social, economic, and cultural deprivation
- Poor fit of Maori in mainstream education – impact on future employment and self-esteem
- Lack of positive role models
- Parental disengagement
- Replacement for whanau
- Provides sense of place, belonging and status

Gaps in Services

- In-risk youth disengaged from services – hard to reach; resource intensive
- Young Maori males – poor fit in education
- Community agencies experience service fragmentation and isolation
- Funding constraints barrier to collaboration and local need response
- Reliance on voluntary sector to meet shortfall
- Local hapu, iwi and marae under-resourced

The Way Forward

- Requires a community-development , multi-systemic approach (Spergel's Model)
- Support and resource early intervention (prevention)
- Community agencies best placed to respond to local need – require acknowledgement and effective resourcing
- Youth Development strength-based approach – focus on whanau; community; education or employment and peer group
- Overlaps with other SWBS Flagship projects – Communities First; Poets Corner; Cool things for Youth To Do

Spergel's Approach

- **Organisational Development and change**
 - Adopt policy allowing services to work collaboratively
- **Community Organisation**
 - Mobilising local communities to address issues
- **Social Intervention**
 - Youth outreach and street work including detached youth workers
- **Opportunities**
 - Education and employment
- **Suppression**
 - Arrest and incarceration
 - Intensive supervision and sharing of intelligence



Restoring Whakapapa Links

... a restorative process is required for many young Maori who are disconnected from their whanau, hapu and iwi. ... needs to support initiatives to reconnect young Maori with their Whakapapa links and encourage Kaupapa Pakeha (mainstream) institutions to be more responsive to the needs of young Maori” (Youth Development Strategy, 2002).



Promoting Connection

- Boredom a contributing factor to young people engaging in negative activity
- Provide safe, enjoyable and affordable activities for young people
- Encourage connection and positive adult role models



“With both prospects and wannabes, if you offer them something better than what they’ve got then they’ll do it ... It would be good to put a sports club in Fairfield. Sports teams are gangs but they are positive gangs. Gangs normally fulfill functions for kids, but the (the kids form here) can’t access positive gangs (*Research Participant*)

Recommendations

- National funding and resourcing is regionally-based and focused on short, medium and long-term solutions
- Support agencies working at community level with vulnerable families to work effectively
- Provide opportunities to support vulnerable youth to recognise and access alternative career and life paths
- Youth Gang criminal and anti-social behaviours are deterred

Youth Gangs: A Local Response Toolkit

- Assessment phase (complete)
- Interagency governance group – complete
- Communication strategy – in process
- Stocktake of services – complete
 - Undertake stocktake of youth workers
- Develop Action Plan
- Implement Action Plan

Action Plan

- Governance Group – SWBS Leadership Forum
- Informed by Research recommendations and MSD Local Response Tool kit
- Inter-agency working party (Community and Govt)
- Intelligence sharing
- Communications Strategy
 - Proactive
 - Good news stories
 - Key spokespeople (Police, MSD, HCC)
- Focus on 20 young people – wrap around services/engagement
- 3 stream approach
 - Suppression
 - Intervention
 - Prevention