GANGS
A REVIEW OF LITERATURE & STRATEGIES

A Report Prepared for the Safe Tairawhiti Community Trust

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Preface

This report was commissioned by the Safe Tairawhiti Community Trust. It addresses numerous issues supplied by the Trust: definitions of gangs; common needs of gang members; effective control strategies; and a discussion of matters relevant to the Mongrel Mob and Black Power gangs in Tairawhiti.

In order to produce this work within budget, decisions have had to be made in relation to prioritising of content. In a research area as complex and multifaceted as this, there are a number of investigative paths available. We have selected the ones which we see as the most important in order to give a rounded understanding of the areas in question.

Notwithstanding the above, this report has been aided greatly by research we completed in 2006 for the Ministry of Social Development. Furthermore, due to the dearth of local research, this paper is heavily reliant upon material from overseas. This provides important insights but some of it is not wholly applicable to this country. One obvious point is that much of the international literature deals with youth gangs in urban environments, and not the rural and small town settings that characterise a great deal of Mongrel Mob and Black Power activity. Another factor, as international investigators recognise, the specific geographical and cultural context in which gangs arise also influences their morphology. Thus, indigenous and contemporary Maori culture, set against a background of British colonialism and cultural domination, are important factors in the way gangs in New Zealand have developed (see, eg, Newbold & Jeffries, 2010; Taonui & Newbold, 2012).
Executive Summary

1. Definitions

- Definitions of gangs are difficult but important. The way gangs are defined influences the way they are viewed and how they might be responded to.

- Gangs may be usefully viewed as progressing through, or fixed within, different stages of organisational development.
  - **Incipient gang**:
    - A group of individuals with a loose structure, few formal rules, 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 identified as such by others in the community.
  - **Gang**:
    - A structured group (of five or more people) that maintains an exclusive membership marked by common identifiers and formal rules that supersede the rules of the state.
  - **Criminal gang**
    - A structured group (of five or more people) that maintains an exclusive membership marked by common identifiers, formal rules that supersede the rules of the state, and which has an organisational focus on profit through crime.

2. Common needs of Gang members in Aotearoa and Gisborne: Theory and explanation

- Gang members are often subject to the negative realities of modern life and membership in a gang can fill members’ needs for belonging and status.

- Gang membership involves a number of ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors. ‘Push’ factors include family instability, poor schooling, poverty, new or unsettled communities, and poor employment prospects. ‘Pull’ factors include prestige, thrills, power, and a need for belonging and protection.

- There is a multitude of individual and community-based factors that either encourage or discourage gang membership.
3. Strategies to prevent entry into gang and transform gang culture away from violence – the overseas experience

- It has been argued that, compared with many forms of crime, crime by youth gangs should easily be addressed. Despite this, there have been very low levels of success among the different interventions implemented to date.

- Both internationally and in New Zealand, gang problems have most recently been left for the police to solve, although suppression through law enforcement has proven largely unsuccessful.

- Other responses have had mixed results. Single faceted approaches have seldom been effective, although in recent times there have been more promising developments. The greatest chances of success come from multi-pronged strategies that accept the idea that gangs are not the problem but a symptom of wider social concerns.

- Gang programs and strategies that are often categorised as Prevention, Intervention and Suppression, can be further refined as:

  1. Community Organisation
  2. Social Intervention
  3. Opportunities
  4. Suppression
  5. Organisational Development and Change.

Of these, Community Organisation and Opportunities strategies have been found to provide the greatest chances of success, particularly when combined with other initiatives.

4. Strategies to prevent entry into gang and transform gang culture away from violence – the New Zealand experience

- Apart from a concerted social policy agenda between the late 1970s and the late 1980s, New Zealand has generally relied on an approach of suppression to solve gang problems.

- There has been a significant move back toward more socially aware policies with regard to youth gangs in the new millennium.

- Gang programs stemming from non-governmental social development are currently being undertaken. Although there is a positivity around these projects, they have lacked vigorous evaluation so their effectiveness cannot be ascertained.

**1. Definitions and Categorisation of ‘Gangs’ and ‘Gang Culture’**

The first systematic study of gangs in America was conducted in 1927 by the Chicago sociologist Frederick Thrasher, who defined gangs in terms of the process by which they are formed:
The gang is an interstitial group originally formed spontaneously, and then integrated through conflict. It is characterized by the following types of behavior: meeting face to face, milling, movement through space as a unit, conflict, and planning. The result of this collective behavior is the development of tradition, unreflective internal structure, esprit de corps, solidarity, morale, group awareness, and attachment to a local territory (Thrasher, 1963/1927: p.46).

Over time, definitions of gangs changed to reflect an element of criminality; expressed most notably by Klein in 1971 who defined gangs as:

Any denotable adolescent group of youngsters who: (a) are generally perceived as a distinct aggregation by others in their neighborhood; (b) recognize themselves as a denotable group (almost invariably with a group name) and (c) have been involved in a sufficient number of delinquent incidents to call forth a consistent negative response from neighborhood residents and/or enforcement agencies (Klein, 1971: p.13).

Klein’s definition was influenced by interviews with police and thus has a strong law enforcement component. The problem in using such an approach is that often it means gangs become regarded as an issue of law and order rather than as an entity in themselves, creating a tendency to look at the symptoms of the problem rather than at the problem itself.

In an effort to focus attention away from simple criminality, Hagedorn offers the following definition:

Gangs are organizations of the street composed of either 1) the socially excluded or 2) alienated, demoralised, or bigoted elements of a dominant racial, ethnic, or religious group (Hagedorn, 2005).

The above definitions highlight how differently one can frame the issue of gangs. Despite attempts like Hagedorn’s to shift away from a law and order focus, most definitions of gangs used today contain such an element. This is perhaps unsurprising, since if gangs did not engage in criminal behaviour they would be unlikely to attract attention. The danger with law enforcement-type definitions is that they tend, erroneously, to characterise criminality as being the gang’s primary defining feature. In truth, gangs form in a way that is little different to how many other human associations form. To a greater or lesser extent, crime may be part of the gang’s activity, but seldom is it central to it, nor is crime the gang’s primary raison d’être.

It is hard to pinpoint exactly when a group of individuals who hang around together with a common identity, lifestyle and culture, becomes a ‘gang’ (Goldstein & Kodluboy, 1998). An associated problem is that the term ‘gang’ can apply to a wide variety of groups, from relatively small, well organised and exclusive motorcycle clubs such as Highway 61 and the Hell’s Angels, to semi-organised mass groups like the Mongrel Mob and Black Power, to the disorganised and amorphous associations of kids on the street.

In an attempt to solve this problem, Carl Taylor (1990) has described three categories of gang. These gangs he labelled ‘Scavenger’, ‘Territorial’ and ‘Organised’. While there have been some criticisms of these categorisations (eg Klein, 1995: p. 134), and they may not be fully applicable to New Zealand, Taylor’s format is useful because it underlines the flexible
nature of gangs. Gangs are not static entities. They evolve in response to environmental influences and may present different configurations over time. In a similar vein, Horowitz (1990) also supports the use of multiple definitions, arguing that they allow us to explore alternative aspects of the gang experience. In fact Horowitz goes as far to say that researchers can basically use any definition they choose.

The vast majority of gang experts, however, recognise the need for a standardised definition of some kind (eg Lafontaine, Ferguson & Wormith, 2005; Maxson & Klein, 1996; Curry, Ball & Decker, 1996; Spergel, 1995; Maxson & Klein, 1990). A commonly-recognised definition – or set of definitions – means that comparisons can be made between localities, as well as allowing for assessment of fluctuations in gang numbers and gang crimes. It also means that gang programmes can target particular groups in a more uniform and systematic way.

In looking specifically at the New Zealand situation, Gilbert (2010) has sought to differentiate between young gangs which often have a fluid existence and the older, established groups. He also distinguishes between those that have become focused on profit driven crime from those that have not. Gilbert’s definitions are as follows:

*Incipient gang*:

A group of individuals with a loose structure, few formal rules, 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 identified as such by others in the community.

*Gang*:

A structured group (of five or more people) that maintains an exclusive membership marked by common identifiers and formal rules that supersede the rules of the state.

*Criminal gang*:

A structured group (of five or more people) that maintains an exclusive membership marked by common identifiers, formal rules that supersede the rules of the state, and which has an organisational focus on profit through crime.

Being ‘structured’ means that the group has a formal or recognised hierarchy. ‘Exclusive membership’ means that there is significant rigour in selecting membership – which usually occurs over a long time period. A person cannot just join a gang in the same way that they can join a mainstream sporting or social club. ‘Common identifiers’ are symbols that represent the gang and can only be worn/used by members. These may include symbols such as back patches or ‘colours’, handshakes, hand signals/salutes, and tattoos. There may also be less formal identifiers such as verbal calls or slang names. ‘Formal rules’ may be written or unwritten and are known by all members. These rules are immutable and must be adhered to under any conditions. If the laws of the state clash with the rules of the gang, gang rules take precedence. Finally, ‘organisational focus on profit through crime’ means that the gang aims to create revenue for the club or its members through criminal enterprise. In this definition,
the criminal endeavours must be undertaken by the gang as a collective and not by single members, or small groups of members, acting independently. Also, the ‘profit’ component excludes crimes not undertaken to make money.

Recognising gangs in terms of their various orientations allows agencies to devise more accurate and effective strategies for containment or control.

2. Common needs of Gang members in Aotearoa and Gisborne: Theory and explanation

**Social Factors**
Thrasher’s 1927 seminal study, *The Gang*, identified characteristics of gangs that are still relevant today. He recognised the evolutionary elements of gang development and also the influence the gang can have on individual behaviour. Conflict with other gangs serves to intensify solidarity within a gang - especially for new members. This was later expanded upon by Frank Tannenbaum (1938: pp.19-22) who developed the idea that a cohesive effect is created within gangs by excessive societal reactions. This occurred, he believed, through the ‘dramatization of evil’, whereby significant negative attention is brought to bear on gangs, and their youthful activities are seen in forcefully negative ways and repressed. Regardless of the intentions of these actions, repression results in gangs becoming more cohesive, alienated and insulated from the mainstream community. This conclusion is supported by New Zealand research (Gilbert 2010) and should be an important consideration in developing gang control strategy.

The post-WWII interest in the gang phenomenon produced a number of important theories, many based on general notions of crime and delinquency after the 1930s depression. These can largely be categorised in two groups: Anomie Theory and the Theory of Cultural Transmission.

**Anomie Theory**
Using ideas initially conceived by 19th century French sociologist Emile Durkheim, in 1938 Robert King Merton developed a theory of ‘anomie’ to describe deviant reactions that arise when the socially approved goals of society are out of reach to many people through socially acceptable means. Reactions often involve resorting to goal attainment via illegitimate or criminal means. From this base Cohen (1955) developed the theory of status frustration to explain gang members’ delinquent behaviour. He argues that since they are unable to attain social status through legitimate means (such as passing school exams), many working class and low-achieving boys are drawn to gangs, which redefine success in terms of toughness, fighting ability and criminal activity.

**Cultural Transmission Theory**
Cultural transmission came out of the ‘urban ecology’ studies at the University of Chicago in the 1920s and 1930s, and was refined by Shaw and McKay (1942) and Sutherland (1947) who suggested that criminal behaviour, like conformist behaviour, is learned through social interaction. They argued that certain localities within cities have a culture of crime that is passed on intergenerationally, despite changes in the population base. This is because there are socialising systems within certain neighbourhoods that perpetuate criminal culture. Sutherland (1947) termed this process ‘Differential Association’, with criminals learning
criminal behaviour in the same way that non-criminals learn conventional behaviour. In other words, criminals are not under-socialised, they are just socialised differently. Miller (1958) applied this to gangs, rejecting the idea that society has a single set of cultural values, and suggesting that the lower classes possess values that are relevant to their own lives and experiences. Gang behaviour, he said, is merely an extension of working class culture.

These two theoretical approaches were dominant during the peak of gang research in the 1950s and 60s and also significantly influenced the course of modern inquiry when it began its resurgence in the 1990s. By this time, however, economic factors affecting gang membership were changing.

One significant explanation for gang developments in the U.S. in more recent times has been the emergence of what are called ‘underclass’ communities, which particularly vulnerable to economic downturns. Whereas Thrasher and other early researchers looked at neighbourhoods that were unstable due to the influx and exodus of migrants, underclass communities are intergenerationally stable and mired in endemic poverty. This is important to New Zealand, as we can see parallels here to the ‘urban drift’ of Maori and Pacific island migrants of the 1950s and 60s, followed by the intergenerational welfare-reliant communities that emerged from about the mid-1970s.

The effects of a permanent underclass on gang longevity and career criminality was championed by Hagedorn (1988) and has been picked up by others including Short (1990) and Klein (1995). These authors agree that the increasing urban underclass is the “foremost cause of the recent proliferation of gangs and the most likely predictor of its continuation” (1995: p.194).

The underclass hypothesis is one of the most useful theoretical frameworks developed to understand gang membership and behaviour in the contemporary era. Although it has difficulty explaining why gangs are absent in some situations where conditions suggest they should be present (Hazelhurst & Hazelhurst, 1998a: p.6), or why gangs emerge in some small communities without deprived economies, it still has much validity. Economic changes in America since the 1980s, including a shift away from manufacturing and toward a service-based economy, have created social conditions that have fostered gang developments (Bursik & Grasmick, 1993; Hagedorn, 2002; Spergel, 1995). The proliferation of urban gangs since the 1980s have been intricately connected to wider macro forces.

Moore captured such changes when she returned to the barrios of Los Angeles in the 1980s after an initial study in the 1970s. She found that despite improvement in ethnic minority political representation, economic restructuring had meant that ‘good’ jobs had vanished and new waves of Mexican immigrants had created further pressure on the scarce numbers of low wage and insecure jobs that existed. Furthermore, the types of government programmes provided by President Johnson’s ‘War on Poverty’ in the 1970s, were largely a thing of the past. In all, there were fewer opportunities for those who joined gangs to cut loose from their adolescent ties (J.W. Moore, 1991: p.23). The gangs were more deviant and more violent, more isolated from other adolescent peer groups and less tolerated by adult communities (J.W. Moore, 1991: p.132). Moore concluded, “the gangs are no longer just at the rowdy end of the continuum of adolescent groups – they are now really outside the continuum” (J.W. Moore, 1991: p.132).
Similarly, Jankowski (1991) felt that structural conditions within U.S. society had helped gangs to gain greater longevity by offering fewer opportunities for working class males to enter the legal labour market. Thus they tended to stay in the gangs for longer and to move into profit driven crime. Taylor (1989) also linked the economic to and gang changes. For Taylor, the economic conditions of Detroit were a significant influence on that city’s gangs and their moves toward sophistication and profit driven crime. During 1980s, the unemployment rate in Detroit exceeded the national average as the city’s large automotive industry suffered in the face of foreign competition. Without this industry to provide large numbers of jobs for unskilled workers, “urban gangs have replaced Ford, GM, and Chrysler as major employers. Social conditions created by industrialization are now producing criminalization” (Taylor, 1989: p.2). Similar to the conditions of Detroit, New Zealand underwent fundamental economic restructuring in the post-1984 era (Russell, 1996), and this led to greater profit driven criminal enterprises within groups such as Black Power and Mongrel Mob (Gilbert, 2010).

But while it is well documented that gangs are a normal working class phenomenon, born of abject social conditions (see Fagan, 1990; Jankowski, 1991; Short, 1996; Vigil, 1991), as Sutherland noted, it is also prudent not to place an over-reliance on socioeconomic conditions as a single cause of gang membership. Different communities have different cultures and some societies with similar social and economic conditions have differing degrees of gang problem. Thus, it is argued, there is a multitude of factors within communities that either encourage or discourage gang membership (Miller, 1990: p.281). Furthermore, the gangs that exist often reflect their unique surroundings, and it is not difficult to reach the conclusion that within “the United States, the combinations and variations in the American street gang seem at times to be endless” (Covey, 2003: p.56). Little perhaps has changed since Thrasher (1927: p.45) said, “No two gangs are just alike”. This is particularly so for gangs of different ethnic make-ups.

These variations can perhaps be overplayed. As Klein (1995: p.108) points out, certain ethnic differences may reflect migration pattern as much as they do cultural patterns, “It remains safe to say that black-Hispanic gang differences, though notable, still pale in the face of their structural and behavioral similarities”. Vigil and Yun (2002: p.165) suggest that street socialisation blurs ethnic differences “because remarkably similar things are learned on the streets where fear and vulnerability generate the need for protection, friendship, loyalty, and other routines and rhymes provided by the gang”. In short, differences may be easy to find, but gang similarities may be more prevalent and significant. With this in mind, we turn now to look at the social psychological factors that encourage gang membership.

**Psychological Factors**

Many researchers have studied gangs from a social psychological standpoint, attempting to identify what membership offers for a potential recruit. Carlie (2002), for example, has described the allure of the gang in terms of needs fulfilment. Gangs, he says, fulfil:

- **Lower level needs:**
  - *Physiological needs* (hunger, thirst, shelter, sex, and other bodily needs); and *Safety related needs* (security and protection from physical and emotional harm).

- **Higher level needs:**
Belongingness (affection, belonging, acceptance, and friendship); Esteem (self-respect, autonomy, achievement, status recognition); and Self-actualization (the drive to fulfil one's potential).

Thus, Carlie argues, gangs serve a purpose and are therefore functional. Their members “derive psychological benefits of recognition and respect” and gain in “self-esteem and in social status” as a consequence of acceptance within a gang (Carlie, 2002). Joining a gang, therefore, can be seen as a rational decision (Decker & Van Winkle, 1996: p. 17).

Gang membership involves both ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors (Decker & Van Winkle, 1996). The ‘push’ factors relate to external forces within the wider community while the ‘pull’ is the perceived benefits of membership. Expanding on this analysis, pull factors can be related to prestige, thrills, power, belonging and protection; while push factors can be seen as the negative social forces that are prominent in gang areas, such as family instability, failure at school, poverty, life in new or unsettled communities, and having poor employment prospects. Seen in this way, motivation for joining gangs is rather straightforward. The economically deprived often face significant difficulties and hardships, to which the gang provides a remedy. We argue that these influences are transferable to the New Zealand context.

Klein’s (1995: p. 198) Structural Variables Model (below), highlights many of these issues.

Thus, for Klein, structural ‘Underclass’ variables explain the emergence of gangs within young male minorities from working- and lower-class sections of cities. Two other variables,
‘Onset’ and ‘Maintenance’, both contribute to the emergence of gangs; the former being structural and the other psychological (for further explanation see Klein, 1995: p 197-202). Of note, Klein says that gang intervention programs can act as a maintenance variable, something which is explored further below.

Lafontaine, Ferguson and Wormith (2005: p.29-30) summarise the risk factors of gang membership within four domains: individual, familial, community, and school. Their research suggests that gang youth have more risk factors than non-gang youth in several domains. These are:

- **Individual Risk factors:**
  - Previous acts of delinquency
  - Negative peer associations
  - Pro-violent approaches to conflict resolution
  - Low self esteem
  - Lack of attachment to ethnic background

- **Family Risk Factors**
  - Poor family management
  - Low level attachments and poor supervision
  - Violent siblings
  - Parental involvement in violent activities
  - Abuse and maltreatment

- **Community Risk Factors**
  - Increased levels of criminal activity
  - Gang presence
  - Lack of opportunities including economic, social and recreational
  - High drug trafficking areas

- **School Risk Factors**
  - Lack of attachment to school, including teachers
  - Negative teacher perception of the student
  - Low achievement
  - Learning disabilities
  - Negative labels on the student

For many youths, the initial contact with a gang or the desire for membership simply occurs out of a quest for enjoyment and belonging. Hanging about with a group of friends provides something to do, and in many areas associating with friends means getting involved with a gang (Decker & Van Winkle, 1996: p. 14). However, once a gang is established in an area and begins to build a reputation, the fear it generates can force a defensive reaction. Easily exploited, isolated individuals may feel pressured to join a gang for their own protection (Decker & Van Winkle, 1996: p. 23). Often, then, gang membership begets gang membership.

Numerous overseas studies show that gang members have a significantly higher rate of delinquency than non-gang members (Thornberry et al., 2003: p. 96; Howell, 1998: p. 284; Klein, 1995: p. 112). However, it is unclear whether this criminality is due to the gangs themselves or to the breakdown of state and social controls in the communities within which
gangs exist (Fagan, 1990: p186). In other words, it is possible that offending is incidental to gangs and that much of the crime committed by members would exist without gang membership.

Formal membership of gangs is overwhelmingly a male privilege. Female gangs have traditionally been rare and their role within male dominated gangs has been marginal (Klein, 1995: p.65). Jankowski found that in all the gangs he studied, “women were considered a form of property” (Jankowski, 1991: p.146). More recent research shows the role of females may not be so subservient and that they may be more prominent and active in gang activities (Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Chesney-Lind, Shelden & Joe, 1996). Regardless of their exact status and role, female gang members and associates are influenced by similar psycho/social factors that influence male membership (Klein, 1995: p.66; Spergel, 1995: p.96) and, on the whole, gang programs targeting males are just as applicable to females (Miller, 2002).

The fact that the majority of New Zealand youth gangs involve Maori and Pacific Peoples does raise the issue of the importance of ethnic factors. Some kaupapa Maori research argues that the cultural degradation of Maori and the racism of colonisation are responsible for the economic deprivation of many Maori communities and are thus linked to Maori offending (Jackson, 1987/8). However, while some established gangs, notably Black Power and the King Cobras, have adopted a strong ethnic identity, their formation was related primarily not to ethnic interests but to their individual communities. The advent of Pakeha gangs from depressed communities, primarily by way of skinhead groups, supports this idea. A similar pattern is replicated overseas (Klein, 1995: p. 70; Bursik & Grasmick, 1993). Youths growing up in areas such as the deprived districts of Gisborne are likely to have friends or family that are gang members or associates. In these contexts, gang membership is ‘normal’ activity and, in the tradition of Cultural Transmission theory discussed above, becomes part of the ordinary socialisation process. Issues surrounding ethnicity, therefore, may be important in understanding how and why derivation exists in some communities but it is not – on its own – a precursor for gang membership. This, however, is not to be confused with the idea that a better understanding of one’s culture may assist in rehabilitation approaches. There is a belief among many that this may in fact be of assistance to curbing anti social tendencies.

William Bolitho (1930) and Emory Bogardus (1943) were two of the first gang researchers to specifically link cultural factors and gang membership. Bolitho believed the cultural clash between immigrant parents and American culture led to a defection from cultural norms and consequently a repudiation of legal norms. Bogardus identified social pressures such as problems with language and school, conflicting methods of parental control, racial discrimination and low socioeconomic status as factors pushing Mexican boys toward gang activity in California.

It was James D. Vigil (1988, 2002), however, who has most thoroughly examined ethnic specificities and gang membership. Vigil’s simple but brilliant framework explains that gang formation is not an inherent element of any given ethnicity, but that ethnic minorities are more likely to form gangs because of the specific social issues such groups face – a situation he called ‘multiple marginality’.

The process of multiple marginality involves broad elements, such as racism and social and cultural repression, as well as immigration or migration patterns that produce enclave settlements within which low socioeconomic status relegates minority groups to society’s
fringes (Vigil, 2002: p.7). This process of marginalisation continues with the breakdown of both formal and informal social controls leading to ‘street socialisation’ (Vigil, 2002: p.10). This occurs when families, under stress in poor jobs and in deficient housing, fail to provide adequate supervision, and is then reinforced by failure at school due to language difficulties and “culturally insensitive and ethnocentric curriculum” (Vigil, 2002: p.9). Youths facing similar circumstances cling together and often find themselves having negative interactions with law enforcement creating hostile attitudes and a rejection of mainstream social norms, at which point they commit to alternative street rules and identity, often via gang membership.

3. Strategies to prevent entry into gang and transform gang culture away from violence – the overseas experience

Compared with other forms of criminal activity, offending by youth gangs, in theory at least, should have a much better chance of being reduced. According to Miller there is a number of reasons why this should be so, for example the fact that youthful groups are seldom committed to membership in the way that adult gangs are, and that youth are more easily swayed by external influences. Moreover, the ostentatious visibility of youth gangs and their activities makes it easy for social agencies to identify and target them (Miller, 1990: p.265).

Despite this, in practice, gang (both youth and adult) interventions have had strikingly low rates of success (Klein, 1995: p.137; Miller, 1990: p.267). In fact, it has been said that “[t]he history of efforts to solve the youth gang problem in the United States is largely filled with frustration and failure” (Howell, 1998: p.285).

The reasons are varied. Among them are that gangs are seldom seen as a priority for state spending (Miller, 1990: p. 275); that communities with a gang problem often deny the existence of the problem (Trump, 1996: p.278-9; Klein, 1995: p.87); and that there has traditionally been a paucity of systematic analysis into what actually works and what does not (Spergel, 1995: p.172; Miller, 1990: p.267; Howell, 1998: p.285, Klein, 2011; Wilson & Chermak, 2011).

The last point – a lack of systematic analysis – is crucial in the context of this report as it points to why so many attempted gang interventions have failed. For instance, in a concerted effort at combating the gangs in the early 1990s, the California’s Office of Criminal Justice Planning spent $6 million dollars in one fiscal year on 60 separate projects. Included were school programs, street work programs, community mobilisation, diversion alternatives and a wide array of criminal justice initiatives. Yet, as Klein (1995: p. 138) explains, “not a dollar went on an independent evaluation of the effectiveness of these projects.” Sixty wasted opportunities to assess these efforts, to Klein, is “an inexcusable exercise in public irresponsibility” (Klein, 1995: p. 138). Because of a lack of data – not just from California but from anywhere – we are reliant on the few researchers who have undertaken reviews of programs. Although these investigators question the quality of much existing information, they do – with minor exceptions – reach similar conclusions. Unfortunately, there are no silver bullets.

Strategies to reduce or eliminate gangs are commonly grouped into three areas, namely: Prevention, Intervention and Suppression.
Prevention

Prevention programs look to discourage at-risk youth from joining gangs. Strategies include community organisation, improving conditions for youth, early childhood programs, school-based programs, youth clubs, and after school programs. Prevention programs have a long history in the US. Early prevention programs were based on community organisation and reform that could improve neighbourhood conditions. One of the first was the Chicago Area Project (CAP) of the 1930s. Despite the absence of empirical evaluation the program is still running – suggesting it has a high perceived value in Chicago (Howell, 2000: p.5) – but perhaps low effectiveness. Another is the New York Mobilisation For Youth project (MFY). The MFY project, which has been assessed, has been described as a “controversial and massive failure” to achieve lasting reform” (Klein, 1995: p.141).

Less ambitions strategies, such as education in schools, are also part of the prevention agenda. Such programs can involve Universal/Primary Prevention, which targets a whole population; Selected/Secondary Prevention aimed at higher-risk populations; or Indicated/Tertiary Prevention, aimed at specified high-risk populations such as peripheral or ‘wannabe’ gang members (Lafontaine, Ferguson & Wormith, 2005: p.35). Miller (1993 in Howell, 1998: p.299) believes education programs need to start very early, concentrating on three groups: preschoolers (ages 1-5); preadolescents (ages 6-11); and adolescents (ages 12-19). Huff (1996: p.99-100) found that in America, youths tend to begin their association with gangs at about age 13, join six months later and get arrested about six months after that. This, he suggests, lends importance to pre-teen preventions. Such programs have faced their own difficulties, however, as they require knowledge of the predictors and causes of gang membership. Because these are many, broad and interconnected, they are difficult to isolate and treat. Also, Klein (1995: p.137) suggests that, because status and identity are important drivers of gang membership, programs that specifically target potential gang members often worsen the very problems they attempt to prevent by specifically identifying some gangs. This may lead to a strengthening of gang cohesion. As noted in the definitions provided earlier, properly identifying and targeting different groups may avoid these pitfalls. For example, a young, LA style street gang would warrant a different approach to a mature patched gang like the Mongrel Mob, since the latter is already well established and institutionalised.

In the 1990s the Gang Resistance Education and Training Program (GREAT) became popular in America. GREAT is a universal school-based program for middle school children (ages 9-13), taught by police. Being universal, the program escapes the problems raised by Klein, while educating children in a number of areas such as the effects of drugs, conflict resolution, cultural sensitivity and understanding racism, decision making, and use of interpersonal skills. Although the program initially reported encouraging preliminary results, further research suggested that it had no significant impact on reducing gang membership or delinquency. However, some positive results were noticed after a ‘lag’ period of four years. These included participants having more negative views about gangs and more positive attitudes toward police (Esbensen, Freng, Taylor, Peterson & Osgood, 2002: p.162).

The team that reviewed GREAT concluded that it was unlikely that there is any easy solution to the gang problem and noted that a single strategy of education is unlikely to be of much effect if the underlying causes of gang membership remain. The team also said that GREAT would be best served working in tandem with other programs as part of a “comprehensive strategy” aimed at individuals, peer groups, family, school and the community (Esbensen, Freng, Taylor, Peterson & Osgood, 2002: p.162).
Undeterred, the GREAT program was reworked and launched as GREAT II in 2003. The original curriculum was rewritten to accommodate a strengths-based approach, with a tighter focus on the known risk factors for gang involvement. In addition, the new program became part of a more comprehensive school, family, and community approach with police encouraged to partner with community organisations. Two goals were identified: 1. to help youths avoid gang membership, violence, and criminal activity; and 2. to develop a positive relationship with law enforcement (Esbensen, Peterson, Taylor, Freng, Osgood, Carson & Matsuda, 2011: p.56)

A recent review of GREAT II revealed significant positive effects in five of nine variables studied. These effects were that participants, “were more likely to report positive attitudes about police...less positive attitudes about gangs...more frequent use of refusal skills...greater resistance to peer pressure...and lower rates of gang membership” (Esbensen, Peterson, Taylor, Freng, Osgood, Carson & Matsuda, 2011: p.64). While none of the remaining four measurable variables reached statistical significance, the new program was seen as more effective than the first. This shows the importance of evaluating programs which can then be changed to gain incremental improvements.

**Intervention**

*Intervention* programs have been more common than preventive ones. Intervention programs work with gang members to reform, rehabilitate, and channel existing or fringe members away from crime and toward more positive pursuits. In many cases the vehicle for this change has been seen to be the gang itself (Spergel, 1995: p.174). Intervention programs have focused on education and work opportunities as well as counselling and health services. Perhaps the most renowned efforts have come from detached youth workers – an approach used (but not comprehensively evaluated) in New Zealand in the 1970s and 80s. Detached youth workers commonly form close bonds with gangs, advocate on their behalf and offer support and direction to members in what is called “curbside counselling” (Bursik & Grasnick, 1993: p.164). In the past, these programs have been unclear as to “whether the central goal was control of gang fighting, treatment of individual personality problems, provision of access to opportunities, alteration of basic values, or prevention of delinquency” (Spergel, 1995: p.248). Although there are some who argue for the benefits of detached worker programs (Bursik & Grumsky, 1993; Cloward and Ohlin, 1960), two detailed studies by Miller (1962) and Klein (1971) have shown that such schemes fail to impact greatly on gang crime. Klein even suggests that reform programs often “inadvertently increased gang cohesiveness and gang-related crime” (Klein, 1995: p.137). Even when intervention programs have sought to avoid creating greater gang cohesiveness and, indeed, have worked to break it down, successes have been brief. One such program, for example, known as the Ladino Hills Project, had significant success while in operation but the results soon faded. Klein concluded that the lesson was obvious and important: “Gangs are by-products of their communities: They cannot long be controlled by attacks on their symptoms alone; community structure and capacity must also be targeted” (Klein, 1995: p.147). This point is important, and one that is investigated by some New Zealand gang strategies – that being to target at risk communities rather than specifically the ‘gangs’. *This is perhaps the most important observation of this report; and explains why many so policy initiatives in the past have failed to deliver meaningful, sustainable, results.*
**Suppression**

*Suppression* – based largely on the concept of deterrence – has become overwhelmingly the most common international approach since the 1980s. This has happened for a number of reasons, including: the ineffectiveness of prevention and intervention, the proliferation of gangs in cities, increases in gang crime including violence and drugs, and public support for ‘get tough’ measures. Under the strategy of suppression the problem is seen as one for the police rather than for social agencies. This has certainly been the case in New Zealand. Nobody denies the need for police and judicial activity but as a lone force, suppression is costly and any gains are short term (Sherman in Howell, 1998: p.294). On its own, in fact, suppression has proven perhaps the least successful of all interventions (Decker, 2002; Klein, 1996; Spergel & Curry, 1990). Suppression can even have a negative impact as members convert stigmatisation into a symbol of status (Klein, 1995: p.186). A reliance on police as public commentators on gang issues can also be problematic as many police have a narrow view of gangs and criminality, which may be transferred to the public through the media. This can lead to simplified, stereotyped notions about the nature of gangs and how best to respond to them (Klein, 1995: p.189). One element that is required is accurate police coding of gang crimes (Howell, 2000: p.53). The data thus obtained would be useful in understanding gangs in different areas and any changes in their behaviour. Recognising the weakness of suppression, one experienced American police officer has commented that gangs “are not a law enforcement problem. Putting more kids in jail is not the answer to the gang problem any more than putting drug addicts in jail is the answer to the drug problem. There needs to be a strategy, a well thought-out, multi-disciplinary strategy involving all aspects of the community, not just law enforcement” (cited in Klein, 1995: p.153). Notwithstanding this, however, we argue that getting police ‘buy in’ to gang initiatives is crucial. Without it there will be constant friction within approaches.

Klein (1995: p.138) concludes, “In sum, we have three different approaches that are based on different assumptions and that have goals difficult to achieve and procedures wrapped more in ideology than in empirical knowledge. The challenge is for preventers, reformers, and suppressors to use the available data to design intelligent programs with an empirical base”. Toward the end of the 2000s, this began to occur as newer programs took on multifaceted approaches. Perhaps the most significant of these programs were being reviewed in the middle of the first decade of the new millennium, but their genesis is in research that commenced more than two decades ago.

It was not until the late 1980s that the first nationwide survey of youth gang programs in the US was conducted. Headed by Irving Spergel, researchers conducted a broad assessment of youth gang prevention, intervention and suppression strategies in 45 American cities. Spergel broke down the gang initiatives, expanded on the dominant tripartite segmentation, and categorised the strategies as: Community Organisation, Social Intervention, Opportunities, Suppression, and Organisational Development and Change.

1. **Community Organisation**: *local community organisation or neighbourhood mobilisation*. Community organisation efforts are used to bring about change among groups and organisations in regard to community problems or social needs. Goals or activities that encompass community organisation include:

   - Cleaning up graffiti in the community
   - Involving the schools
   - Mobilizing the community
• Building community trust
• Involving parents in community programs
• Educating the community
• Changing the community.

2. Social Intervention: youth outreach and street work counselling. Social intervention includes detached youth work, recreational and sporting activities, counselling and advocacy. The strategies used are:

• Crisis intervention
• Service activities
• Diversion
• Outreach
• Providing role models
• Leadership development
• Inter-gang mediation
• Group counselling
• Temporary shelter
• Referrals for service
• Religious conversion, counselling of gang members
• Drug use prevention/treatment
• All psychological approaches
• All social work approaches
• Post sentencing social services
• Work with the gang structure
• Helping members leave the gang
• Tattoo removal.

3. Opportunities: jobs, job training and education. Opportunities is an approach that “emphasises large scale resource infusions and efforts to change institutional structures, including schools, job opportunities, political participation, and the development of a new relationship between government and local neighbourhoods in the solution not only of delinquency but of poverty itself” (Spergel & Curry, 1990: p.286-7). Opportunities provisions include:

• Job preparation
• Job training
• Job placement
• Job development
• School tutoring
• Education of gang youth.

4. Suppression: arrest, incarceration, and supervision. Suppression involves obvious techniques such as arrests, prosecution and imprisonment but also tactical patrols, intensive supervision, intelligence gathering and charting, publishing and sharing law enforcement information. Suppression includes:

• Enforcement
• Neutralisation
• Investigation
5. Organisational development and change: institutional and policy adoptions and mechanisms. This strategy refers to interagency collaboration and involves specialised service delivery strategies that target gang issues. These include:

- Internal agency coordination
- Improving organisational efficiency
- Program development
- Advocacy for legislation
- Specialised training
- Additional resources
- Case management
- Use of media.

Although suppression has been the most frequently employed strategy, Spergel and Curry (1990) conclude that Community Organisation and Opportunities are the two most effective interventions, despite being the least prevalent. Although their study conceded that social intervention, suppression and organisational change approaches also may be beneficial, they are only so when community organisation and opportunities provision are dominant strategies. They conclude:

The implication of our finding is that more resources alone for police or even human service programs would not contribute much to dealing effectively with the youth gang problem. It is more likely that community mobilization and more resources for and reform of the educational system and the job market, targeted at gang youth or clearly at-risk youth, would be more cost effective as well as more effective in the reduction of the problem …

Policy recommendations emanating from these findings would not necessarily require a renewed war on poverty, but rather a series of programs targeted specifically at the youth gang problem addressing not only issues of economic deprivation and lack of opportunities but the social disorganization and the mobilization of community institutions in a concerted attack at the problem. Distinctions in policy emphasis also would have to be made depending on the nature and the level of severity of the problem in particular cities (Spergel & Curry, 1990: p.309).

Although the original research measured perceived improvements in the gang situation, in 1993 Spergel and Curry conducted a follow-up study to check the actual validity of their
initial results. From a survey of 21 cities, empirical indicators including the numbers of gangs, gang members, gang related assaults, and gang related narcotics incidents, found that “perceptions correlated perfectly with the empirical indicators” (Howell, 1998: p. 296). The findings of the original research were thus vindicated.

From this work, Spergel and others created The Comprehensive Community-Wide Approach to Gang Prevention, Intervention, and Suppression – often called the Spergel Model. Based on the findings of the earlier research, the model requires:

...the development of interrelated strategies of community mobilization, social intervention, provision of social opportunities, suppression and organizational change, in a cluster of criminal-justice and social-service agencies, schools, and grassroots and other organizations working together to serve and control a target group of gang delinquents, as well as youth highly at risk for gang involvement” (Spergel, Wa & Sosa, 2005e: p.11.1).

A key to this approach is interagency communication and action and the mobilisation of different elements within the community. Local people (including ex gang members) work with police and probation officers, church groups, teachers and community leaders, non-profit organisations and sporting and recreation groups. A steering committee of local representatives oversees the initiatives which are targeted at the specific problems within the community. For example, an area with an already high amount of gang activity requires a different approach to one where gang activity is less obvious. Community responses must be informed by a thorough assessment of gangs, the crimes they commit, and the problems that exist within their environments. Local research and knowledge is therefore essential (see also Lafontaine, Ferguson & Wormith, 2005: pp.11&104; Howell, 2000: p.53; Klein, 1995: p.71; Vigil & Long, 1990).

Spergel’s approach has been tested in a number of contexts. Its application in the Little Village project in Chicago, for example, offers significant optimism with, among other things, a reported 40 percent reduction in violent crime in the sample group (The University of Chicago Chronicle, 19-1-2005). The Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority concluded that, “the project appears to have been a success” and that, “the cohesive team approach was probably at the heart of the project’s success in reducing gang crime, particularly gang violence” (cited in Howell, 2000: p.38). According to gang-member feedback, recreation and sports services were well regarded in the Little Village program and, along with job placement opportunities, were viewed as helpful in curbing gang activity (Howell, 1998: p. 297).

Five similar projects run by the US Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) have produced mixed results. Two of the projects (Mesa and Riverside) found the program produced significant positive outcomes but the other three (Bloomington, San Antonio and Tucson) were found to have had little or no effect (Spergel, Wa & Sosa, 2005a,b,c,d,e). The programs that failed had difficulties with implementation. For instance, in Tucson there were problems in getting a coordinated approach – particularly with the Tucson Police Department – poor grassroots involvement, failure to provide education and employment opportunities, and failure to establish a “pro-active and sustaining Steering Committee” (Spergel, Wa & Sosa, 2005e: p.11.6). The elements of failure are important to note, as it is by learning from problems, mistakes or errors that improvements can be made.
The Spergel model is said to have had an impact on older gang members, but less on young ones (Klein, 2011: p.1039). While this may mean that some of the ‘success’ may be from natural drop off in criminal behaviour, it also may be well served on institutionalised and older groups such as the Black Power and the Mongrel Mob.

In spite of often conflicting outcomes, however, there are certainly enough data now to confirm that multi faceted approaches do have the best chance of success – although they are not without their problems. One such problem is in identifying what facets within ‘comprehensive programs’ have worked and which ones have not (Klein, 2011: p.1040). Moreover, even the latest attempts at comprehensive programs are struggling with implementation issues and conflicting agendas (Klein 2011, pp.1041-1043).

Notwithstanding the idea that comprehensive approaches are largely seen as optimal, there are numerous more modest and newer programs that highlight further issues worthy of note, including cautionary observations. Therefore, we now turn to canvassing a range of recent programs that have been reviewed in the last few years; including parental support, mentoring, the use of sport, and dramatic novel interventions.

**Recent Research**

*Family-focussing*

Despite the known and well-established family factors influencing gang membership, interventions targeting families have been few or peripheral to major gang programs. This is regardless of the fact that programs focusing on improved parental education, child behaviour management and relationship quality can be effective in preventing and reducing serious antisocial behaviour (Welsh and Farrington, 2006). With this in mind, a number of researchers have posited that a parent-focused method may be usefully employed in the gang realm (Aldridge, Shute, Ralphs, Medina, 2011). There have, however, been a number of potential problems identified with this form of approach. These problems are: a narrow focus on parents can ignore the multiple processes effecting gang membership (a nod to compressive models); the problem of effective targeting (it is argued that behaviour rather than affiliation should be the focus); and that a mistrust of social agencies and/or the stigma of being seen to need help may inhibit the effectiveness of such programs (ibid p.372). One further issue, particularly pertinent to New Zealand where gangs are deeply embedded within certain communities, is that parents may not view gangs as bad (or wholly bad) and may themselves have very close, long-term associations with them.

One technique that has become popular in recent times is the mentoring of at risk youth - often youths with family members in gangs. In the U.S. there are 1,700 registered monitoring programs, and the biggest, a program called *Big Brothers and Big Sisters*, is supported by more than 500 agencies (Medina, Ralphs & Aldridge, 2012: p.14). In the early 2000s, these programs also became popular in the UK (ibid). A number of meta analyses have been done on numerous mentoring schemes – all of which have shown the schemes to have mixed results with only the very best showing small to modest positive effects (ibid, p.16). The evaluation of one recent program targeting gang siblings in England and Wales found similarly equivocal outcomes.

Researchers have discovered that, “although it is well perceived by the parties involved and may be a useful tool to engage hard-to-reach families, the real impact and efficiency of mentoring for gang prevention has yet to be clearly documented” (Medina, Ralphs &
They suggest that only programs that are well targeted and have sufficient intensity and timeframe should be implemented, for there “is a risk that any positive impact of the scheme on participating children may quickly dilute and that the programme may become yet another negative experience with statutory agencies for families” (ibid: p.22).

Medina, Ralphs and Aldridge also had concerns around issues of stigmatising youth and suggested that only well funded programmes of significant intensity be undertaken. “In the light of this, it seems that great care should be taken when using mentoring, particularly in isolation from other measures, as a way of tackling the risk of gang membership” (Medina, Ralphs & Aldridge, 2012: p.22).

**Pro-social pursuits**
Channelling gang-affiliated youth into pro social pursuits has long been an avenue for interventionists. One recent study involved 16 Latino youth gangs and incorporated Hellison’s Teaching Personal Responsibility Model (TPSR) into a soccer program. The program sought to instil in participants a number of positive social and psychological traits including respect, self control, effort and participation, caring and leadership, self direction, and transference.

A review of this program involving quantitative data analyses showed “significant increases in personal and social responsibility levels, modest improvements of grade point averages, and significant reductions of police contacts, arrests, and suspensions after the intervention” (Buckle, Veri & Walsh, 2011: p.35). While encouraging, we caution against drawing too much from one small study and highlight it here as part of a wider discussion on the breadth of gang intervention and prevention techniques.

**Shock tactics**
Another recent and more novel approach relies on a type of shock tactics to alert gang members to the possible outcomes of their lifestyles. Called *A Second’s Chance* this intervention program targeted gang members via the police and the courts who then participated in a ‘true-to-life’ emergency department ‘resuscitation and death’ of a gang member. Researchers reported that 90 percent of participants provided “positive meaningful” responses to the intervention in a number of indices, but there is no indication of what, if anything, this meant for the future behaviour of participants past the 180 day review period. (Hughes, Griner, Guarino, Drabik-Medeiros, & Williams, 2012).

**Street liaison**
Another approach targeting violence prevention used adaptations of detached street work. One recent program is an important example of the need for caution. *One Vision One Life* was a Pittsburgh based initiative that used street workers, who were familiar with the local gangs, to gather intelligence and mediate in inter gang disputes. Workers also sought to create links between troubled communities and social agencies. Despite similar programs achieving certain – often substantial – successes elsewhere, a review of *One Vision One Life* found that gang violence actually *increased*. This may have been due to weaknesses in the program itself – specifically its poor implementation (Wilson & Chermak, 2011). The review provides an important cautionary tale.

In reviewing international literature, then, it is clear that tackling the gang issue is not easy and that attempts to do so are varied, leading to frustration as much as to success. Indeed,
while we can considerably from international experiences, there is no template response to
the local gang issue and all of its variances. Gangs in different areas create different social
problems based on the unique situation of their environment. With this in mind, New Zealand
needs its own research and its own solutions to address the problems that are specific to it.
Unfortunately, New Zealand’s experience has yielded even less experimentation and even
less evaluation than has been the case overseas.

4. Strategies to prevent entry into gang and transform gang culture away from violence – the New Zealand experience

Generally, gangs in New Zealand have been seen as an issue of law and order and thus as an
issue for the police to deal with. This is despite the fact that, as previously noted, approaches
relying on ‘suppression’ have been shown as unlikely to succeed.

The most significant exception to this occurred in the late 1970s through to the latter half of
the 1980s when the National Government, as part of wider program of ‘make work’ schemes
to counter rising levels of unemployment, introduced an agency (known as the Groups
Employment Liaison Service or ‘GELS’) to work with gangs and get them into employment.
This was driven by a liberal view held by influential politicians and public servants that if
gang energies could be harnessed and channelled into positive forces, a permanent change in
their orientation could be achieved. The GELS idea itself came about following a
governmental report on gangs, known as the Comber Report (Committee on Gangs, 1981), in
the early 1980s, and expanded on the principle of detached youth work that had been
operating since the 1970s.

GELS sought to assist gang members into different government funded employment
schemes. The principle was not to disband the gangs – on the contrary, members were
encouraged to work together – but to curb anti social behaviour by replacing it with, and
rewarding a pro-social alternative. High on the priority list was engagement with wider
society.

Despite a belief among many that the schemes were curbing the anti social activities of the
gangs, the economic reforms of the 1984 Labour Government meant that the ‘make work’
schemes favoured by the interventionist National government lost favour and a series of high
profile incidents, as well as a realisation that the schemes were being widely abused, helped
ensure their demise by the late 1980s.

From the end of the 1980s, therefore, the country returned to suppression as its primary
response to the gang problem, an approach that was enhanced by the failure of the GELS
schemes. Since the 1990s, suppression has overwhelmingly dominated New Zealand’s
response to gangs.

It is perhaps no surprise that since the 1990s, when suppression has taken a monopolistic hold
on gang control efforts, there has been an almost total dearth of governmental research into
the gang phenomenon. In 1996, when a raft of anti-gang legislation was introduced, it was
specifically acknowledged that no independent research was available to judge the extent and
nature of the ‘gang problem’ in New Zealand. Prior to this, in 1970, in 1981 and in 1987,
governmental committees convened for the purpose of examining the gang situation had all
made it clear that gangs, as a social problem, require social solutions as well as legal ones.
This advice appears to have been ignored. Instead of a coordinated multi-faceted approach, repressive law enforcement strategies have reigned supreme. Unsurprisingly, they have had little success. For example, legislation targeting gang fortifications, participating in a criminal group, and, in one city, banning gang patches, has failed have any lasting impact on gang activity. In 2008 the Organised and Financial Crime Agency (OFCANZ) was created within the police. Although some gang members have been divested of large amounts of capital as a result of OFCANZ and the laws under which it operates, the attractiveness of gang membership appears unaffected.

Where ‘Incipient’ gangs described at the beginning of this paper are concerned – for example the young LA-style ‘homie’ gangs – a more considered and evidence-led approach is visible. In 2006, following a spike in gang related killings, the government commissioned a research project on youth gangs in South Auckland (Ministry of Social Development 2008). It produced a ‘Plan of Action’ that, based on best practice ascertained from overseas research, looked to provide ‘wrap around’ services in a multi agency response. This plan had the support of the police, and in particular was driven by one high ranking South Auckland police officer. Initial results appear encouraging. A review of the program reported a reduction in youth gang activity (Ministry of Social Development 2010: p.16). Although this conclusion was based on certain stakeholder perceptions rather than on empirical research, optimism may be taken from the fact that a major US study (involving 21 cities) found that “perceptions [of gang improvements by key stakeholders] correlated perfectly with empirical indicators” (Howell 1998: p.296). Moreover, encouraging signs in relation to youth offending in South Auckland were also captured by objective indices. Following a peak in 2006, the year the plan was devised and implemented, overall youth apprehensions dropped in Counties Manukau. Between 2007 and 2008, apprehensions of people aged 20 years and under fell by nine percent1, while the nationwide average was an overall increase of three percent (Ministry of Social Development 2010).

Furthermore, positive results were found in the Manukau City Council’s annual perceptions survey with regards to questions on crime and safety. Between 2006 and 2009, residents who said they felt ‘safe’ of ‘very safe’ in their homes, in their neighbourhoods, and in their local town centres (both during the day and after dark), increased among all categories (Ministry of Social Development 2010: p.18).

Recent years have also seen a number of gang initiatives that have derived from non-governmental social projects. A selection of these follow:

The E Tu Whanau Programme
Run by Waikohiki Community Charitable Trust, The E Tu Whanau Programme has worked with Black Power and has also brought Black Power and Mongrel Mob members together to help them gain “understanding of each other’s issues as a step towards peace on the streets and in the jails” (Report, March 2011). One significant coming-together happened at Otarata in early 2011, and was facilitated by John Wareham. Promises of cooperative coexistence were made by both parties. Considering their long history of intractable enmity, the fact that the groups agreed to meet at all is perhaps a success in itself. Whether the peaceful commitments made during the hui have resulted in a permanent truce between the two gangs is unclear.

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1 This decline was evident in every age bracket used to record apprehensions: under 14 years of age, 14-16, 16-18, and 18-20.
At another E Tu Whanau hui in August 2011 involving Black Power, members identified a number of areas they wished to explore:

- Discovery of whanau potential
- Nurturing of whanau potential
- Improvement of self-reliance & home management
- Fostering support for whanau in healthy & safe lifestyles
- Fostering support for whanau in training & employment
- Promotion of violence free homes

This list highlights an awareness of the issues that – as noted earlier – researchers have identified as being crucial to reducing gang membership. Furthermore, the gang’s willingness to engage with the E Tu initiatives suggests an awareness of a need to change. If that awareness was translated into action, children and families of gang members would certainly benefit. While promising in theory, once again there are no data to show that any lasting changes actually occurred as a result of the commitments made.

**Youth Action Plan – Hastings**

In Hastings, a Youth Potential Action Plan has recently been implemented. Overall, the goal of the plan is to “prevent Hastings youth from joining gangs and participating in criminal activity” (FTP Consulting, c2011: p.4). To achieve this outcome, four strategies have been identified:

- Developing self belief in youths’ own abilities by succeeding in engaged activities and gaining recognition for their productivity
- Increasing positive connections between youth and community, government and business networks with pro social activities
- Engaging youth in interactions whereby they can successfully predict the outcomes of their actions
- Providing opportunities for youth to strengthen their social and cultural identity and connectedness (*ibid*).

At time of writing implementation of the plan, over one year, has been completed. A review is expected shortly.

**The Wesley Program**

A further noteworthy initiative is being undertaken by Wesley Community Action, a social service branch of the Methodist Church committed to social justice and social development. Wesley has worked with both Black Power and the Mongrel Mob to instil a pro social agenda, and in recent times has engaged in activities designed to bring together members of both groups – with a particular focus on children. The program was initiated in reaction to “a desire to respond to the incidences of gang clashes, conflict, escalating tension, aggression and violence” (Wesley Community Action, 2009: p.7).

Among the activities undertaken, the four most significant are:

- A Wainuiomata Whānau Camp in 2007
- A Tokaanu Tailrace Horse Trex in 2008
- A Public Forum in 2008, and
• A Matiu Island Leadership Development and Dive Course in 2009

The purpose of these activities is stated to have been to “provide a range of positive experiences and learning, particularly de-mystifying communities and individuals to each other, to learn how they can co-exist peacefully, and to others such as local agencies and government departments through the Public Forum” (Wesley Community Action, 2009: p.7).

As an experimental project the developers admit it is “frequently confusing and frustrating” but this confusion is viewed as part of a dynamic or “emerging” process and that levels of discomfort (on all sides) are seen as a “key strength of the journey” (Wesley Community Action, 2009: p.11).

The key ingredients of the Wesleyan approach have been defined as:

• A positive strength based orientation.
• Leaders remain in control and having [sic] the ability to rely on each other’s [sic] expertise.
• Understand that these types of initiatives are not ‘the solution’ and as such cannot be one-offs if they are to be truly successful.
• Understand that these initiatives are also a part of much more ambitious and challenging longer term aspirations, to support rangatahi and their communities.

Some characteristics of the approach are: that the activities are seen as being undertaken by three groups in partnership, not as two client groups assisted by Wesley; the importance of Tikanga Maori, which provides an inroad for motivational speakers addressing the groups; and the importance of engaging with gang leadership. Wesley considers that Black Power and the Mongrel Mob are not ‘hard to reach’ if they are engaged with correctly (Wesley Community Action, 2009: pp.9-11).

Encouragingly, there is reflexivity to the approach whereby feedback is gained from participants in order to refine its methods. Once again, however, specific outcomes of the approach have not been independently assessed. We believe that evaluation is underway, but the reliability of the testing process is unknown.

CART

Finally, in recent years a community based programme operated in South Auckland in response to the spike in gang related killings mentioned earlier. This was known as the Hard to Reach Youth Project (HTRYP). This initiative is somewhat unique in that it has been evaluated. Undertaken by the Consultancy Advocacy and Research Trust (CART), HTRYP had three basic aims:

• To engage, liaise and mediate processes with hard to reach youth groups in South Auckland.
• To liaise with Government and community agencies, to facilitate support for those hard to reach groups, and to work towards realising their potential.
• To gather and provide information about the key lessons from the project to inform the Te Puni Kōkiri policy sector (Kellie Spee Consultancy, 2011: pp.10-11).

There are a couple of issues worthy of note. Having a feedback line to inform policy is an encouraging component. Furthermore, like some other initiatives in New Zealand, the
HTRYP has moved away from using the term ‘gang’ because of its negative stereotypical connotations. Instead, the phrase, ‘hard to reach youth’ is used as a general term, with ‘youth crews’ for incipient gangs and ‘clubs’ for established patched gangs like the Mongrel Mob or Black Power. This helps to de-politicise the gang issue, which is particularly relevant to projects such as this that use gang members to operate or assist with programs. Indeed, the review of the HTRYP stated that:

The project has come under negative media attention and has been reported as a ‘gang recruitment programme’. Public perception drawn from false representations of the project and negative associations with established clubs has hindered the achievement of outcomes, particularly in drawing support (openly) from local and central government agencies (Kellie Spree Consultancy, 2011: p23).

Despite this, the HTRYP review found that the project had a significant effect in halting retributive violence among warring ‘youth crews’ and a visible impact on the level of street crime in South Auckland (Kellie Spree Consultancy, 2011: p26). As noted, police-reported crime levels have actually fallen in South Auckland. Exactly how much of this can be put down to HTRYP is uncertain, but people close to the program are sure that its role has been vital.

Overall, then, the picture of New Zealand programs is that they are varied and changing, and that their effectiveness is unclear. In the US Klein recently said, “Indeed, one could infer ... that almost everything is ‘promising’ because so little has been tested properly”. The same is true of this country. That is not to devalue the importance of innovation. As Wilson and Chermak (2011) observe, new initiatives in programs are critical to addressing the manifold problems presented by gangs. Experimentation should therefore be encouraged – but it must also be controlled. For while workers may be sincere, innovative and intrepid, they also need guidance from principles of best practice derived from years of prior research. And of course, there is the imperative of monitoring. All programs, particularly those reliant on public funding, should be subject to rigorous, regular and independent evaluation. This is essential not only to justify the money invested in them, but also to ensure that remedial interventions do not inadvertently make things worse.
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