After School Intervention for At Risk Youth

Program Plan

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Introduction:

As the gang presence in Mt.Vernon, WA grows the violence grows and starts moving north, however the resources for these individuals and those at risk does not grow. The city of Mt. Vernon has seen the violence increase between two main gangs over the last ten years and while the police are aware of this, the community agencies do not seem to be. In this city there is a gang task force that meets once a month, this task force consists of the police department, the prosecutor, parole, probation, the sheriff' office and many other rotating police from neighboring cities. At these meetings the topic is generally more focused on what the major crimes have been in the month, where they are located, who are the major players and who is getting released from jail. While this puts the police on higher alert on who and what to look for this is still a very punitive measure of control. Yes, the more police attention the more gang members could, possibly think twice before committing a crime, but in reality that is not going to help the problem in the long term. Taking major players off the street and being aware of where and when crimes are being committed is a great step in reducing gang violence in the moment, but this approach does nothing to help with long-term prevention. When some of the current major players are taken out of the picture for a few years, that leaves room for those already in the gang to move up and bring in new members. We do not feel this program needs to change or be removed, but that other agencies and programs need to be in place along with the task force to combat this social problem. When you only work at a solving a problem from one angle then more room is left for error. However, when you come at it from multiple angles there is a better chance at success. This is the gap in services, the city is only working at the problem through the law enforcement side, there are no community agencies involved.

The gang problem is spreading fast in Skagit County and has recently started migrating

north to Whatcom County. Whatcom County has in the last few months started to see some of the signs that the gangs that were once thought of as just a Skagit county's problem are quickly becoming their problem. Without the collaboration of different agencies the gang problem will continue to grow. We believe that the fact that the gang problem keeps spreading is reason to believe that the gang task force at work in Skagit county is not sufficient enough to make an impact on the different gangs. Looking into why the more punitive approaches do not work is an important place to start before implementing a new program. Research has shown that a more restorative approach, in most any population, has the best and most long-term affects.

Many youth join a gang because they are trying to find a relationship that they are not getting at home (Bilchick, 1998). The gangs which are present in Mt. Vernon, WA and Skagit County are the ones migrating north to Whatcom County. We, along with Bilchick (1998), believe that the low economic cycle, family dysfunction, lack of resources, negative labeling by society, and lack of positive role models are all contributing factors in why youth join gangs. If the community and agencies within the community collaborate then together they can work to decrease the number of youth that join, therefore decreasing the gang related violence. A youth center that allowed youth an outlet for positive social activity, access to positive role models and community learning about how to help youths in gangs wanting to get out can all have a positive impact on the gang membership and violence in our community before it becomes a large social problem.

Program Description:

The program is targeted at youth middle school age (6th, 7th, and 8th graders) with in the Whatcom County area. With the rise of gang violence with in the county, this age group especially prone to joining gangs. Using our goals, objectives and activities, we will then

collaborate with the Gang Task Force from Skagit County, the Bellingham Police, Whatcom County Sheriff's Office, local lawyers, judges, Bellingham School District and other community members to plan a curriculum for the after schools programs. The Bellingham School District is allowing us to use the cafeteria at Bellingham High School every Tuesday and Thursday from 3:30 to 5:30pm. Transportation is a possible problem our program faces, as many parents will not be able to bring their children. There is currently discussion regarding using one of the school buses to pick up the youth and bring them to Bellingham High School. The high school is also on a common WTA bus line, which could be another possible transportation source. Haggen's Food and Pharmacy has been generous enough to donate snacks each afternoon, so that when kids arrive they will be provided with some sort of snack item and water. From about 3:45 to 4:15 there will be volunteers who are able to help with homework. This will be a quiet time for all students to work on their homework or do a quiet activity such as: reading, coloring, etc. At about 4:20pm children will be asked to come talk about the days planned portion of curriculum. This could include activities, larger or small group discussions; this time is a time to really have the youth interact with community members, make connections with others and see what other alternatives there are outside of gangs. This will last for about 40 minutes after which kids will get to participate in a large group physical activity until parents come to get them.

Funding right now is limited; therefore, community involvement and support will be extremely important. Teaming up with the school district allows us to go talk to students and parents about the program. This is a very inexpensive way to get some publicity. In teaming up with local law enforcement and the gang task force, it gives the program a sense of credibility that will help reassure parents. It is likely that the program will need to charge a fee of about $10 or $15 per child. This will be used for materials and possibly transportation fees. By receiving

more funding we could potentially charge little to nothing; as many of the youth that are at the highest risk come from low-income families. The biggest asset the program has is the community members who will be coming into talk to the students, as well as help them with their homework and serve as role models. This shows how much the community cares and supports these youth.

Goals:

1. Support youth trying to leave or not join the gang life style by providing alternative positive activities, which work against the main reasons for joining

2. Partner with Gang Task Force, community agencies, and community members to promote an anti-gang lifestyle

Objectives:

For Goal One:

1. Give youth a safe place to spend time and have fun

2. Create relationships between youths and a positive role model

3. Create a place for youth to connect to the community

For Goal Two:

1. Promote community awareness of the gang problems and proper intervention strategies

2. Create a more unified anti-gang front

3. Allow communication between multiple agencies and law enforcement to combat the social problem

4. Promote community awareness of gang problem and proper intervention strategies

Activities:

- After school program with an evidence based curriculum to help with academics

The curriculum used will be created through research on activities that build self-esteem in youth and teach them basic life skills. This will have to be implemented in a creative way so as not to make this program feel like school, since they will have just completed a full day of school. The idea is that this program teaches concepts that are not taught or addressed in traditional school, but in a fun and safe environment.

- After school program which provides physical activities, including recreational sports games

Participation in physical activities is good for youth, it allows a release of energy, creates a feeling of belonging, and is an outlet for their competitive side. Research shows that being apart of a team can boost self-esteem, which is one of the goals for our program. This will be a fun and simple way to work towards that with the youth and to help create bonds between the youth participants and the adult staff and volunteers. This would also be a good place to start build a mentoring relationship between a positive role model and one of the youth.

- Bring in community members who are potential mentors for the youth to interact with in a safe environment

Having community members come in participate and volunteer with this program will help the youth feel more connected to the community outside their immediate community. This is also the population our mentors would be coming from. Allowing community members to interact with at risk youth will also help shape their view of this population, hopefully making their view a more positive one and not the negative label that the rest of society puts on this population. Creating a mind set change in a few community members can start larger social

change if they share their experiences with others within their personal community.

- Bring in community agencies to interact with youth and teach them services available

Working with other agencies will allow the youth more knowledge of the resources within their community that can help them now and/or in the future. Having knowledge of resources can make you feel like you are more able to receive help when you need it and you will know where to go. This knowledge can also be useful to others who will find out the information from the participants, making the information useful to more citizens then just those who are participating in the program. Furthermore, this allows the agencies to have a better understanding of the needs that are in the community and how they can better serve the community.

- Work with community agencies to create a curriculum for the youth entering the program

Working with agencies to create some of the curriculum that will be presented to the participants, will help to teach them the resources available if the agencies are not able to come to a meeting. Also, if a participant misses the day an agency does come they will still get the information necessary. Those who have a lot of experience working with the population in our community may have more knowledge on what will or will not help this population, then general research could. Getting as much information about the specific population is important as we want to be as effective as possible.

- Tutoring for youth with academic problems

As stated by research above, one of the main reasons youths join gangs is academic failure. By having people available to tutor those who need it or want it will help combat this. If youths feel that they have an adult who is willing and able to help them then they are more likely to ask for the help. Keeping in contact with the schools can also help the program staff and

volunteers know what participants are in need of help and will make offering this help more focused, of course it will be open to all students. This also includes help writing and editing admission essay and applications for college for those who are interested. We want to encourage academic success from all participants.

Logic Model

Input	Output		Outcomes/Impact	
	Activities	Participation	Short Term	Long Term
Youth	Conduct after-school programs	Youth	Positive Attitudes	Decreased gang violence
Staff	Train Staff and Volunteers	Staff	Knowledge on how to live an anti-gang life style	Decreased gang involvement
Volunteers	Partner with Law Enforcement and Gang Task Force	Volunteers	Better communication skills	Better overall community health
Law Enforcement	Develop Curriculum	Law Enforcement	Developing short term goals	Connections between community, law enforcement and youth
Gang Task Force	Provide Opportunities to build relationships with other youth and community members	Gang Task Force	Safe atmosphere	Knowledge of anti-gang prevention strategies
Community Members	Positive Adult Role Models	Community Members	Knowledge of Resources	Connections between Community Members and Youth in a mentor relationship
Time	Provide Speakers on gang related issues		Better understanding gang lifestyle and prevention	
Money/Materials			Connections between youth, law enforcement and community	

Indicators:

The indicators for this program will be measurable for both the short-term outcomes and the long-term outcomes. The first main indicator would be the attitudes of the youth within the program compared to when they joined. This would be measured by comparing the intake paperwork, which would include a survey about current situations, behaviors, and attitudes. This survey would be coded with a system so that it would not have any names on them, but so that when the same youth filled out the same one at the end of their participation they would be able to be matched up to compare. Another indicator would be the number of youth that leave the program at the end of the school year with a mentor, with whom the relationship continues outside the program. The more youths who are paired up with a positive role model the more successful that aspect of the program was. The youths academic progress would be yet another indicator if the program is successful. Finally the most basic indicator would be the level of participation throughout the school year and the attitudes of the participants observed over the course of the year.

To measure long term objectives would be the growth rate of gangs in the city of Bellingham. If the growth rate stays the same or increases then the program would need to be re-evaluated and improved, if the growth rate decreases then the program is succeeding. With the rate of gangs hopefully decreasing we would further hope to see a reduction in gang related violence within the community. Also, the community agencies would have a better understanding of what helps to reduce youth who are at high risk for gang involvement and be able to use these strategies within their agencies and other programs. More specifically for the program the rate of youths who attended the program for a number of years and the level of their participation over more then one school year, along with the graduation rates would measure

how successful the program has been in helping youth in their academic careers.

Timeline:

- June & July

These two months will be dedicated to working on the evidence-based curriculum. Partnering with the Gang Task Force, Whatcom County Law Enforcement, and other community members to determine what will be discussed at each session in October-January; these will be tentative plans, as changes may need to be made later on. This will also be the time we begin recruiting volunteers and community members to help coordinate the program every Tuesday and Thursday.

- August & September

These two months will be the period of time when we publicize the new program. Working with the Bellingham School District to attend schools orientations, sending home fliers and doing announcements within classrooms. It is important to talk not only to the parents but also to the students to get them involved as this program is for them. Training for the volunteers is important; once we feel we have enough volunteers, we will begin doing volunteer training. The training will include information on working with youth and gang prevention.

- October

By October, the program will be functioning normally. Meeting every Tuesday and Thursday from 3:30pm to 5:30pm. Youth will be given a snack, and then time will be made for

volunteers to help with homework and interact on a more personal level with the youth. The whole group will then come together and go over the pre-planned activities. At 5:00pm the group will then move to a physical activity.

- November

Toward the end of October there will be a meeting with volunteers to discuss how they feel things are proceeding. It will be a time to evaluate the first month. There will also be focus groups done with the youth to get their feelings on the program.

- December & January

By this time the program will be up and running. At this time, we will begin working on curriculum for the rest of the year. By gathering information on a monthly basis from volunteers, youth and other partners, there will be a frequent evaluation system. This would be an excellent time to implement larger changes if they are needed.

- January thru June

During these months, the program will have become more consistent. Volunteers, youth and community should start to see the outcome of the work that has been happening through the months before. At the end of each month evaluating the past month; taking suggestions, concerns and focusing on what things are working well.

- June

At the end of the first school year, we will be reviewing the entire year as a whole and

reviewing the curriculum for the next year and starting the process over again.

- Future

In the future, we hope to set up a mentorship program. As students make connections with community members at the regular meetings, giving them a space where they can further those connections.

Difficulties:

The largest anticipated difficulty with making this program a success we feel will be getting the youths to come to our program. Many of the target population will not want to come to an after school program. Many youth will not want to stay at school or go to a program at school. In order to get participants we will have to work with the schools to possibly get referrals for students struggling or those who might be interested in our program. Also, once we have the participants coming to the program finding new curriculum and activities that keep them interested to that they will keep being active participants will be a challenge in and of itself. Keeping the physical activities and competitive games a main part of the program we feel will help combat that, along with the positive relationships created will be a major part of what keeps the youth coming back. Furthermore, highlighting the physical activities for our program might be the best way to appeal to the youth. Other difficulties might include getting community members who want to volunteer. The time of day can be difficult for some professionals, which could be a concern. However, we are am confident in the professional members of our

community to be able to get enough to participate by advertising within agencies and even through appropriate Internet sites. Finding volunteers can be a major obstacle for many programs, finding new and innovative ways of gaining volunteers and keeping the turn over rates as low as possible. Keeping volunteers feeling validated, appreciated, and needed are three very basic and very important aspect of retention. Also, making sure they are building relationships with the youth will help with their motivation, allowing them to know that they are having a positive impact on their life. This will be the basis for building a mentoring relationship, which will also work to keep our volunteers.

Reference

Bilchik, S. (1998). Youth gangs: An overview. Juvenile Justice Bulletin. Retrieved from http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles/167249.pdf on January 9, 2010.