

## Street Outreach and the OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model

By: Michelle Arciaga and Victor Gonzalez

### Introduction

Since the early 19th century and the emergence of street gangs within urban population centers of the United States, community members have sought to reach out to these disenfranchised and criminally involved youth to reengage and redirect them to more pro-social activities. Over the years, these efforts have yielded mixed results. For instance, the detached gang worker programs of the 1950s and '60s, while well-intentioned, delivered almost uniformly flat results and may actually have increased the cohesion of the gangs they served, thus accelerating gang offending (Klein, 1971). It seems intuitive that social intervention directed at gang members is necessary and vital as a response to gang violence. However, programmatic results, when these programs have been evaluated, suggest that street-level outreach, by itself, is not sufficient to create a reduction in gang-related crime.

There are several likely reasons for the lack of evidentiary success from many gang outreach programs. First, the problem that outreach workers are asked to solve is unimaginably large and complex:

*By the time 100 boys and girls become affiliated with a juvenile gang, they have experienced 12 to 18 years of formative processes from the family, the neighborhood, and the society. They continue to be bombarded by the contemporary factors of group and social processes, even as we work with them . . . Arrayed against this veritable army of psychological, social and cultural forces is the detached worker and the few resources at his disposal . . . How conceited are we to expect one worker, however reinforced, to overcome substantially the combined forces of family, neighborhood, and society? (Klein, 2007)*

Beyond the size and scope of the problem, Klein noted several other factors that hindered gang outreach work: a lack of techniques specifically designed to prevent/halt delinquent behavior, use of inappropriate strategies that had inadvertent negative effects, and a

lack of allies and leverage from other existing agencies (schools, probation, law enforcement, etc.). (Klein, 1971) The very "detachment" of these workers from existing programs and agencies made their work more difficult.

In 1987, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention launched the Juvenile Gang Suppression and Intervention Research and Development Program, led by Dr. Irving Spergel at the University of Chicago. Spergel conducted a national assessment of agency and community responses to gangs. After reviewing multiple program models and existing programmatic evaluations, Spergel concluded: "neither a single minded suppression nor a single-minded social-intervention approach has demonstrated success in reducing gang crime, especially gang violence." As a result of that assessment, Spergel and his colleagues created the Comprehensive Community-Wide Gang Program Model (Spergel, 1995; Spergel et al., 1992; Spergel and Curry, 1993).

The Spergel Model included a multidisciplinary Intervention Team, composed of law enforcement, probation, and outreach personnel who worked together to case manage gang intervention targets within the context of five interrelated strategies: social intervention, opportunities provision, community mobilization, suppression, and organizational change and development.

This model was initially tested at the Little Village Gang Violence Reduction Project in the Little Village section of Chicago and significantly reshaped the role of street outreach workers based on lessons learned in previous decades, creating:

*"[a] structural relationship of street workers, police, probation, and representatives of other community groups...established for purposes of integrated suppression and social intervention through a team arrangement to address the gang-violence problem... (Spergel, 2007)*

Street outreach, in the Spergel Model, was not detached. Instead, outreach strategies were fully integrated into a comprehensive response to gangs, which involved other key partners and agencies.

The success of the Little Village Gang Violence Reduction Project led to the creation of the OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model (Model). Since the 1990s, the Model has been tested in targeted sections of more than 20 different communities around the United States, from large cities (Los Angeles, California; Houston, Texas; Miami, Florida; Milwaukee, Wisconsin) to mid-sized cities (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Richmond, Virginia; North Miami Beach, Florida) to small urban and rural communities (East Cleveland, Ohio; Mount Vernon, Illinois; Elk City, Oklahoma; Glenn County, California; Longview, Washington). (National Gang Center, 2010)

This article provides an overview of best practices developed in these sites for street outreach in the context of the OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model.

## Street Outreach in the Model

Street outreach in the OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model occurs inside the framework of a cooperative relationship with other agencies, including probation, law enforcement, social services, and schools.

Outreach workers in the Model are referred to as “street” outreach workers because their work is not office-based or even institutional- or school-based, but occurs primarily in the targeted neighborhoods, at the street and home level. However, outreach work in the Model is not “detached” from the work being performed by other agencies, and outreach workers are not assigned to work only with a single gang.

Outreach workers serve gang members within a targeted community. These gang members may have a history of being difficult to serve and/or engage through mainstream agencies. They may also come from areas of the community with significant levels of community and family disruption and disorganization. Further, these gang members are likely to be involved with criminal justice agencies such as courts, probation/parole, and law enforcement.

Outreach workers build relationships with gang members and their families with specific goals in mind: to reduce clients’ bonds to gangs, to reduce gang-related conflict and violence, to support and assist gang members and their families in accessing social and educational services, and to provide a positive adult example and mentoring to the gang members. When necessary to promote community safety, outreach workers may share information about gang member clients with relevant partners. Spergel explained that this sort of information sharing requires

*“a shift in the [historic] outreach youth worker’s role—to collaborate in a suppression approach—and also a shift (albeit limited) in law enforcement’s role—to collaborate in some form of social intervention and even opportunity provision to address the gang problem.”*  
(Spergel, 2007, p. 25)

In the OJJDP Model:

- Outreach workers use screening criteria derived from law enforcement and other data to identify appropriate gang members and make referrals to the Intervention Team.
- Outreach workers work closely with other agencies on a multidisciplinary Intervention Team, sharing information about gang-involved clients and their families with partnering agencies.

## Roles and Responsibilities of Outreach Workers

Outreach workers should be willing to help gang members, including advocating on their behalf, ensuring they have access to services and opportunities, and acting as their link to community institutions. The majority of an outreach worker’s time is spent working directly with gang-involved clients, identifying their needs and goals, and reporting back to the Intervention Team.

The outreach worker should:

- **Build relationships with clients and other gang members**

The outreach worker is a mentor, life coach, positive role model, advocate, and mediator for gang-involved clients. Through consistent one-on-one contacts with gang-involved clients, the outreach worker encourages them to make positive behavioral changes, detach from gang activity, and transition into mainstream society.

- **Recruit gang members**

The outreach worker should spend time interacting with gang members who are not involved with the Intervention Team and encouraging their participation. He should engage the friends and associates of clients who are already participating with the team. Client recruitment may occur at known gang hangouts, parks, or schools. Outreach workers should build relationships with staff members from probation, parole, and other agencies for recruitment and case management purposes. Some outreach workers use general community gang awareness trainings as an opportunity to generate referrals.

- **Serve as the Intervention Team’s eyes, ears, hands, and feet on the street**

Outreach workers provide first-hand information that helps the entire team better understand the clients and the target area. These workers are also sources of information about historical and current gang issues that may affect the Intervention Team’s strategies to prevent gang violence. Although outreach workers spend many hours each week

interacting with gang clients on behalf of the team, they cannot and should not be expected to perform all intervention tasks for the targeted clients.

- **Link clients to necessary services and support their participation**

Through their interactions with clients, outreach workers identify social intervention needs, such as substance abuse addiction, anger/impulse control/mental health issues, and family problems. It is the role of the outreach worker to report to the team on these needs, and to follow up the Team's intervention plan recommendations by providing clients with transportation assistance, support for the client's participation in services, and support of the client's positive behavioral changes. The outreach worker also should be prepared to report to the team if the situation changes, and/or if the client or family stops participating in services.

In addition to identifying services needed by clients, the outreach worker should identify and discuss the client's talents, hobbies, interests and long-term goals and present these to the team.

- **Provide quality interaction with clients**

Every interaction with gang-involved clients is an opportunity for intervention and should be seen as such. For instance, providing transportation to a social services program is an opportunity for the outreach worker to discuss the client's life, concerns, choices, hopes, goals, and dreams. Stopping by to check on the client at home provides the outreach worker with a chance to observe his home life and build a relationship with parent(s) and/or sibling(s). Visits to the client's home, school, or a place of incarceration/detention provide the outreach worker with the opportunity to demonstrate caring, openness, and acceptance of the client's circumstances and issues. The outreach worker should seek out opportunities to build a stronger relationship with each client. Engaging this population may require going the extra mile to provide assistance. For example, outreach workers have been known to drive a client to work on a new job every day for several weeks, to ensure punctuality and develop the work ethic. The outreach worker may also create or coordinate alternative activities and/or group educational components for groups of clients to allow for informal interaction and relationship building.

- **Act as a liaison between project clients and service providers**

Outreach workers should recognize that gang-involved clients may have safety and social concerns about participating with service providers and programs. Will the client be safe attending a particular school? How will the client handle discussing substance addictions with peers? Some clients have had negative experiences interacting with systems of all kinds, from schools to the courts.

The outreach worker can facilitate participation by explaining the client's perspective to service providers. He can also assist clients by explaining the process of receiving services, participating in counseling sessions to provide moral support, attending meetings with clients to help alleviate fears, and personally introducing the clients to service providers.

- **Work with clients on employability skills**

The outreach worker can discuss employability issues such as appropriate work attire, handling conflict on the job, filling out job applications (and providing opportunities for practice with applications and resumes), and dealing with authority. Outreach workers should also assist clients by practicing interviewing skills, candidly addressing behavioral and/or substance issues that may cause employment difficulties, and taking clients to job fairs and to meet with employment specialists.

- **Recognize and reinforce positive behavior**

The outreach worker should recognize and reward clients' efforts to change. For instance, outreach workers may identify clients who are now attending school regularly and work with the Intervention Team to select an appropriate reward, such as a letter of commendation, attendance at a local sporting event, or restaurant gift certificate. Providing recognition and praise for the clients, particularly at an event, function, group, or family gathering, can also be helpful. In many cases, gang-involved clients have been starved for positive attention.

- **Resolve difficulties between clients, their families, other youth, and/or agencies**

Problems and conflicts should be expected with this difficult-to-serve population. Child/family conflicts, peer conflicts, and issues between clients and other agency personnel are likely. The outreach worker should be prepared through training to mediate disputes, help resolve conflicts, and assist with appropriate recommendations.

- **Provide appropriate crisis responses in conjunction with other agencies following a violent incident**

Because of his strong relationship with gang-involved clients, the outreach worker is in an ideal position to help with crisis response. The outreach worker can assist clients and families that have been victimized, work to head off retaliation, serve as a liaison to engage these families and clients with criminal justice and victim advocacy organizations, and alert other Intervention Team members to possible repercussions from violent incidents in the community.

However, the outreach worker also needs to understand boundaries on information sharing when dealing with other agencies after a violent

incident. For instance, the gang outreach worker is not a public information officer and should not be issuing press releases to the media. In most cases, the outreach worker should not be present at the scene of the incident while the investigation is occurring. The outreach worker should not make statements to victims or their families about how the case is being investigated, possible suspects in the case, or motives in the crime, even if he has access to this information. Providing this kind of information can have volatile and possibly violent repercussions.

Police, criminal justice agencies, and schools need to receive training on the role of the outreach worker prior to a crisis scenario so that the outreach worker is not viewed as an interloper. During this training, the outreach worker should explain the work that he will be doing in the community with gang members and their families after an incident and the types of help that he can provide.

Outreach workers must also familiarize themselves with the rules and procedures of related agencies. For instance, if a victim or family is seeking victim assistance funds, the outreach worker must not only be able to help the family fill out an application for funds, but also should know whether the family is likely to be eligible to receive assistance. In some states, for instance, the victim(s) may be ruled ineligible for compensation if the incident is gang-related or the victim is a known gang member. The outreach worker also must be able to explain to family members, friends, and members of the gang how the victim assistance process works and how decisions are made.

In one situation, based upon the advice of the outreach workers, after a gang member was shot and killed, family members applied for victim assistance funds to pay for the funeral. The application for funds was declined because the crime was gang-related. The family was upset by the situation and shared their distress with members of their son's gang. This caused long-term difficulties between the outreach worker and the gang, as well as financial difficulties for the family. If the outreach worker had been aware of existing laws, he could have avoided this problem.

- **Assist families in distress**

The families of gang members youth are often involved in pre-existing and significant crises and conflicts. Many are low-income and may face emergency situations involving safety, housing, food, clothing, power, and living conditions. Outreach workers should try to facilitate immediate services, if necessary. It is important to explain to the family and client how these services work and to discuss available possibilities. The outreach worker should never make promises to clients and his family that he is unable to fulfill, particularly when relying on other agencies for services.

- **Document their activities**

Documentation of their work is a crucial role of outreach workers, and training on proper documentation of all sorts of information should be provided.

## Information Sharing Issues

Intervention Team members and outreach workers need to clearly understand each other's roles so that they do not violate information sharing boundaries. Information obtained from outreach workers should be carefully protected by other team members.

There are several types of information sharing issues that may arise during both street outreach and Intervention Team work. First, outreach workers in many U.S. states fall into the category of mandated reporters. This means that they have a legal obligation to make a report to the proper authorities when they observe or suspect abuse, neglect, or maltreatment of children, the disabled, elderly persons, or other vulnerable populations. For this reason, outreach workers need regular training on issues of mandatory reporting and relevant state laws.

Second, outreach workers may encounter scenarios that pose a risk to the safety of clients, their peers, community members, or Intervention Team members (and their participating agencies). In these cases, outreach workers may need training and assistance to help them identify the best way in which this information can be shared while protecting themselves and their families.

Outreach workers are not:

- Snitches/confidential informants
- Extensions of law enforcement activities or personnel
- Detached workers assigned to work only with specific gangs
- Licensed therapists

It is very important that community members, Intervention Team members, and the gang members themselves see the outreach workers as intervention-focused, and not as law enforcement adjuncts. So, while some members of the team may be able to work closely in public, street outreach workers should be cautious about accompanying police or probation on joint law enforcement activities and/or events.

The outreach worker is not required to report to the Intervention Team on all criminal activities by clients. If information is provided to law enforcement or criminal justice agencies, the officers involved need to be extremely careful to protect the outreach worker's anonymity.

However, outreach workers must share any information

about safety threats to clients, other gang members, community members, or the team. It is important that the outreach worker explain to every client that sharing information about criminal behavior could have possible negative outcomes, including the requirement that the outreach workers inform law enforcement, child protection agencies, or others, depending on the type of information and mandatory reporting laws. An outreach worker may even be subpoenaed to testify in court if prosecutors become aware that the outreach worker has knowledge of a client's criminal activities. It is recommended that outreach personnel brief all new clients with a statement of this sort:

*"If you tell me about (a shooting, possession of a weapon, etc.), I will have to tell law enforcement. So, if you tell me about these kinds of activities, I am going to assume that you want me to take action to keep you and others safe. Do you understand?"*

In cases in which it is imperative (and may be required by law) that outreach personnel report information to law enforcement, they may want to act through an intermediary such as the Intervention Team coordinator. In these cases, criminal justice agencies on the team should act appropriately, but with caution, to protect the safety and reputation of the outreach staff in the community.

Intervention Team coordinators and members should help the outreach workers distinguish the types of information that should be reported, as well as other areas in which outreach workers should exercise personal discretion.

Team members need to work hard to protect each other's safety. As part of their role on the Intervention Team, police and probation have covertly backed up outreach workers who were in dangerous situations. Outreach workers may also need information on potentially dangerous situations, areas, or individuals; warning about planned police activities that may put outreach workers in harm's way (without revealing specific intelligence, addresses, or individuals); and notification of simple things such as court dates, charges, status of investigations, or information that outreach workers can use to dispel rumors about incidents and individuals.

## Hiring, Supervising, and Training Outreach Workers

### Ideal Characteristics of Outreach Workers

An outreach worker must have a thorough understanding of the community that he serves. The best outreach workers have strong ties to the local community and existing relationships with community members. Additionally, the outreach worker must be familiar with gangs/gang activity in the target community and have the skills to work effectively with high-risk teenagers and young adults. Outreach workers should be adept

at accommodating the culture of the target community, and should speak the language(s) most likely to be used by gang clients and their families.

Outreach work is not a 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. desk job in a comfortable office. The majority of the outreach worker's time is spent in homes, schools, local agencies, and on the street, working with gang-involved clients. The outreach worker must be comfortable and willing to work in high-risk community settings at nontraditional hours. The outreach worker must be able to think quickly on his feet and make quick decisions when working with gang members who may make a rash decision to act out violently over the slightest issue.

If a candidate for outreach work has a criminal history, law enforcement and other criminal justice partners must ensure that this individual is no longer involved in gangs, crime, or other questionable behaviors. It also helps if an outreach worker has a limited number of stressors in his life. Finances, relationship issues, child support, outstanding tickets, and poor problem-solving skills can cause issues on the job. Because of the outreach worker's role as a mentor and role model to gang-involved youth, it is important that his behavior be beyond reproach. The outreach worker must be stable enough to allow youth and families to trust the outreach worker to guide them in the right direction. One outreach worker puts it plainly: "You shouldn't clean up someone else's house until your house is clean."

Outreach workers should also have:

- Maturity and good judgment.
- Ability to work independently and manage time effectively.
- Ability to work as part of a team.
- Good communication skills.
- Ability to interact with personnel from a variety of agencies, including schools, law enforcement, probation, religious organizations, and grassroots community organizations.
- An understanding of how these different agencies work and how to utilize them to help gang members and their families.
- Basic computer and writing skills, including the ability to write descriptions of client interactions for project record-keeping.
- Mediation and/or problem-solving skills.

Outreach is intense, demanding work, and people who work in the field of outreach may have less professional experience and polish than those in other fields. For these reasons, supervising outreach workers can be challenging. Some outreach programs have encountered difficulties, ranging from outreach workers carrying weapons on the job to engaging in

sexual relationships with clients. Agencies should develop written policies and procedures before hiring outreach workers. These policies should explain the outreach worker's responsibilities in case management, gang outreach duties, goals of the project, information sharing protocols, proper equipment usage, time, leave, attendance, dealing with the media, program meetings, speaker request inquiries, working with outside agencies, and writing reports. These procedures set the foundation for outreach work and can be used to hold staff accountable during their employment.

## Hiring Versus Contracting

Communities that have implemented the OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model have handled staffing the outreach component in a variety of ways. Some lead agencies have hired new outreach staff specifically to work with the Intervention Team. Other communities have opted to utilize or contract for outreach services from an existing agency with strong ties to the community. In general, the decision to hire new outreach workers or to contract for outreach services from an existing agency depends mainly upon three factors: the type of lead agency, the availability of reputable outreach contractors in the community, and the structure of the project.

**Type of lead agency:** The Steering Committee<sup>1</sup> should examine the hiring policies of the lead agency. The lead agency<sup>2</sup> must have sufficient flexibility to be able to select appropriate personnel for this role. Local units of government may have strict hiring policies, particularly in hiring individuals with a previous criminal history. Schools and criminal justice agencies may be legally forbidden from hiring anyone with a criminal record, which would rule out many possible outreach candidates.

The Steering Committee also must determine whether a specific type of lead agency would put limitations on outreach work that would not be conducive to the project. For instance, being too closely identified with law enforcement can limit the effectiveness of outreach workers and may even put them in danger. If the lead agency is a law enforcement entity, protocols must be created to protect the safety and autonomy of outreach personnel in performing their duties. Outreach personnel should not colocate and/or share office space with law enforcement officers or criminal justice personnel.

If a lead agency is going to be severely restricted in hiring, or the lead agency is a law enforcement or criminal justice agency, contracting for outreach services may be the best option.

**Available Outreach Agencies:** Are there viable organizations in the community that already perform an outreach role? Steering Committees must determine how closely the existing outreach agencies adhere to the protocols of outreach in the Model, particularly in the area of information sharing. What sort of reputation does

each organization have? Will law enforcement agencies be able to work effectively with the organization, or is there a track record of financial difficulties, a taint of possible association with criminal activity, or a history of turf battles? In some cases, community-based agencies, in spite of their good intentions and connection to the community, do not have the credibility with other agencies to contract for outreach services.

Any agency that is considered must meet the following conditions:

- Must have the administrative capacity to fulfill reporting and documentation requirements necessary for case management activities.
- Must have a reputation for professionalism sufficient to be respected by the agencies that will be working as peers on the Intervention Team.
- Must be willing to work with and share information with law enforcement and other criminal justice personnel to address safety and violence risks in the community.
- Must have the capacity and willingness to credibly supervise the outreach workers, including providing regular and appropriate training, addressing work deficits or issues, and overseeing their daily activities.

If outreach services are contracted, how will this contract be negotiated? Reporting and staffing requirements should be clearly and explicitly described in the contract, and the reporting should occur on a regularly scheduled basis (weekly/monthly) versus extended over a longer period of time. There also should be an escape clause in the contract in case the contracted agency is not a good fit for the Intervention Team.

**Structure of the Program:** Is there a full-time coordinator overseeing the implementation of the Model? Will that person have the time and skills necessary to supervise outreach workers on a daily basis? Will the Model be implemented by a lead agency with space for multiple personnel, or will agency personnel be dispersed in the community in their own agencies' offices? Examining the structure of the planned project will provide important insights into whether it would be preferable to hire or contract for outreach services.

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<sup>1</sup>Implementation of the OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model is facilitated by a Steering Committee composed of agency heads, policymakers, and community leaders.

<sup>2</sup>The lead agency in the OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model is the agency that assumes administrative responsibility for personnel, contracting, and other functions. However, the Steering Committee members share policymaking power over the Intervention Team and related programs.

## Allocating Time Effectively

Outreach workers have a demanding list of activities during most weeks:

- Contacts with existing clients (with varying numbers of contacts required per client in any given week)
- Recruitment of new clients
- Assisting clients with skill development, finding employment, resolving family problems, and other advocacy work

While case load sizes have varied, a caseload of 25 clients or less per outreach worker is recommended. In most cases, the average intervention team has used three to four full-time outreach workers to serve 75 to 100 clients. In addition to providing direct services and contacts to clients, outreach workers need to be able to spend time in the community making contacts with possible client referrals, service providers, and families. The level of service provided to each client by outreach workers should be determined by the Intervention Team on an individualized basis. Supervisors can assist outreach workers in prioritizing contacts with clients on the basis of the Intervention Team's recommendations.

Outreach programs should either develop forms for time reporting or use the forms provided in the "Planning for Implementation" manual, available at (<http://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/Content/Documents/Implementation-Manual/Implementation-Manual-Chapter-9.pdf>) to track outreach worker activity levels.

Ideally, supervisors should meet weekly or biweekly with outreach workers to create activity plans. Some outreach workers may not have extensive work histories and may have some confusion about how work schedules should be handled. Supervisors should clearly explain the number of hours to be worked and how those hours should be spent, as well as provide accountability for outreach workers' activities. Supervisors should also clearly explain what outreach workers should not do during work time, such as work at other jobs or participate in athletic activities (e.g., coaching) or religious activities.

Supervisors should conduct regular training on professional topics such as public speaking (so that outreach workers can be involved in providing training and participating in community meetings), working out conflicts on the job, counseling with youth, professional writing, and behavior management issues. The goal should be to provide outreach workers with many opportunities for personal and professional development.

Supervisors should help outreach workers set personal boundaries with clients. For instance:

- Outreach workers should not borrow money or accept gifts from clients or their families.

- Outreach workers should not give personal information about gang members to community members.
- Outreach workers should not take personal disputes with coworkers or Intervention Team members into the community.
- Outreach workers should be careful to identify and avoid any risks for being compromised professionally, whether sexually, physically, or personally.

## Dealing With the Emotional Aspects of Outreach Work

Outreach workers, who deal with a violent population in a community with a high level of violence, may be exposed to a great deal of trauma. Secondary post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can result. The longer and more intensely outreach workers deal with traumatic circumstances, both personally and through their clients, the greater the odds that they may experience PTSD or compassion fatigue.

Supervisors should be prepared for this and should be trained on the warning signs of compassion fatigue/PTSD. They also should create a therapeutic setting designed to prevent the development of negative symptoms. This might include regular group/team meetings where outreach staff can safely discuss traumatic and emotionally draining experiences, support one another, and address their feelings about these experiences openly with people who understand. It may be necessary to have these meetings coordinated by a professional with experience in PTSD. If required, outreach workers should be referred to professionals for support and/or therapeutic intervention, without being stigmatized.

## Documenting Outreach Work

Documentation of outreach contacts and other activities is an important aspect of the outreach worker's role in team-based case management. The team needs to know how much time outreach workers are spending with individual clients, what issues are being discussed, what needs should be addressed by other team members, and the dosage of services that each client is receiving.

Every contact and/or interaction with a gang-involved client needs to be documented. If information about client contacts is not recorded, as far as the team is concerned the work did not occur. Outreach workers should document every contact by answering the following questions:

- Who did you contact?
- Where did you contact him?
- Why did you contact him?

- What was the goal of the contact?
- What was accomplished by the contact?
- What are the next steps for the client?
- What follow-up actions are needed by you or other team members?

Answers to these questions add to the client history and provide direction for future planning activities. Supervisors and Intervention Team members should coach outreach staff on contact goals, next steps, and follow-up actions required.

Outreach workers should ensure that client records focus primarily on service delivery, the needs of the client, participation in services, contacts by outreach workers, and the outcomes of these contacts. These client records, while confidential, are subject to subpoena.

Outreach workers should receive regular training on contact documentation, and their contact logs should be reviewed regularly. It is important to maximize every contact. For example, the goal of a contact might be to transport a client to a job interview, but the time spent driving to and from the interview provides an opportunity to discuss that client's living circumstances, coach the client on behavioral issues, or talk about future goals. These discussions should be captured in writing and reported during the Intervention Team meetings.

Most outreach workers enjoy working in the community with clients but find that staying up to date on documentation, including progress notes and service plans, can be a challenge. Developing a policy for this area can be very helpful in holding workers accountable to ensure that youth and families are receiving adequate contacts and services. For example, the team can decide that outreach workers should spend three to four days per week in the field with clients and one or two days in the office handling documentation and follow-up. Proper documentation is essential to ensure that outreach programs and workers are protected in the event that they are accused of improper behavior.

## Safety Issues for Outreach Workers

Performing gang outreach is a dangerous job. Gang members have poor impulse control and may be armed, and their homes and neighborhoods are frequently violent. Regular safety training and brainstorming sessions among the project coordinator, outreach supervisors, and outreach workers are essential to minimize risks. In some cases, law enforcement and/or other criminal justice personnel should be involved in these safety trainings. Issues that should be discussed include:

## Gang Neutrality

In the past, detached workers were assigned specifically to individual street gangs. Evaluations of these programs found that the presence of detached workers, along with associated group programming, actually increased the cohesion of these gangs and increased their level of criminal offending (Klein, 1971). In addition to this negative impact, being too closely identified with any particular gang can be dangerous and can compromise the effectiveness of overall outreach efforts.

## Clothing

Outreach workers must be careful to avoid wearing the colors, letters, sports paraphernalia, and symbols of local gangs. It is recommended that outreach workers dress in attire that is business-casual to distinguish themselves from local gang members. In some communities, outreach workers have been issued identifying shirts, employee identification badges, or jackets with the name of their program clearly labeled. Outreach workers must realize that the biggest threat to their safety may not come from the gang members who are their clients, but from rival gang members who do not recognize them, or distinguish them as being separate from the gang during an incident. Avoiding gang colors and symbols also helps to ensure that outreach workers are seen as neutral parties and are not associated with one specific gang.

Wearing professional attire can also help outreach workers bridge the gap between schools, community residents, and other agencies whose members may not understand the role of outreach workers and the agencies they represent.

## Weapons

Outreach workers should not carry weapons on the job. Not only is there a significant risk that a weapon might be used against an outreach worker, but many schools, offices, and other locations prohibit weapons. Instead, outreach workers should always carry a cell phone, direct connect phone, or radio in order to access immediate assistance.

## Signs of Drug/Alcohol Abuse

Outreach workers should avoid the company of clients who are under the influence of drugs or alcohol. These individuals may act out in unpredictable ways and may pose a safety risk. Further, outreach workers need to avoid being seen in public with people who are obviously impaired and should personally avoid public intoxication and use of illegal drugs. Regular use of drugs and alcohol by clients should be reported to the Intervention Team for intervention purposes.

## Visual Survey

Outreach workers should be familiar with the colors and other identifiers of gang members in local and

surrounding communities, gang rivalries, and any recent acts of violence between these groups. Watching the news, reading the newspapers and keeping in close contact with clients also will help to ensure that outreach workers are aware of possible concerns. Outreach workers should pay careful attention to graffiti that may include threats or challenges between gangs in the area.

Outreach workers should carefully observe the home of a client before entering. Is there evidence of criminal or illicit activity? If so, the outreach worker must contact the client by phone first, before approaching the house, or reschedule the visit. Is there suspicious activity in the vicinity? Law enforcement may need to be notified.

While working outdoors or on the street, outreach workers should pay careful attention to events in the neighborhood, watch for suspicious vehicles, and identify safe locations in the event of a problem. Drive-by shootings and other acts of violence may occur in areas frequented by gang members or near their homes. Outreach workers should be aware of possible threats and also should consider that they may be caught in the line of fire if a shooting occurs, whether that line of fire comes from a suspicious vehicle or is an exchange of fire involving the individuals they are working with.

### **Working Alone**

Outreach work often entails working alone in dangerous neighborhoods during evening hours. Outreach workers should be briefed on scenarios in which working alone can be dangerous. For instance, when working with a client of the opposite sex, it is advisable that an outreach worker partner with another team member or outreach worker. In some cases, it is advisable that the outreach worker bring a team member to meet with parents of his client.

Outreach workers also need to take normal and appropriate safety precautions. Outreach workers and their supervisors should work together to plan for safety during home visits and community work. Always encourage outreach workers to do safety checks with each other by phone when entering or leaving an area or conducting a home visit. If there is a good relationship with law enforcement, an outreach worker should advise officers of his presence in a neighborhood where there are safety concerns so that the officers can visibly

patrol the area while the outreach worker conducts the client visit. However, there should be no visible contact between outreach workers and police officers.

### **Emergency Scenarios**

Outreach workers, other Intervention Team members, outreach supervisors, and project coordinators should brainstorm how reporting will be handled in the case of an emergency. Who should outreach workers contact first? Should they contact a watch commander or gang unit officer directly? When should they dial 911? They may even need to be briefed in some emergency medical protocols in the event of a shooting or other violent/traumatic injury. Exploring and discussing these worst-case scenarios can greatly improve the odds that outreach workers will be safe and will respond appropriately.

If outreach workers are working as a team, it is helpful to assign roles and develop safety strategies for making visits to parks, schools, apartments, housing units, or any other public places frequented by gangs where outreach workers may wish to make contacts and recruit clients. Dangerous situations can occur, and the team needs to have a clear strategy for how it will react immediately. It helps to have a point person who initiates contact with the gang, youth, or family, a second person who supports and assists with conversation as needed, and a third member of the team who works as a "spotter." This team member should survey the local area while the client meeting is occurring. One team member should be assigned to serve as "crisis response" to any emergency by contacting 911 and the police department, and informing team members that they need to leave the area.

### **Conclusion**

The outreach worker plays a critical role in the community's gang intervention activities and on the Intervention Team. Creating a functional street outreach component is one of the most challenging and worthwhile aspects of implementing the OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model. Potential pitfalls and problems must be thoroughly addressed in planning to ensure that outreach personnel attain maximum effectiveness. Community leaders should carefully consider the hiring, training, supervision, and ongoing development of these important staff members.

### **Resources:**

OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model Online Overview: <http://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/Comprehensive-Gang-Model/Online-Overview>

National Gang Center (2009). *OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model: Planning for Implementation*. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, Washington, DC. <http://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/Content/Documents/Implementation-Manual/Implementation-Manual.pdf>

National Gang Center (2010). *Best Practices to Address Community Gang Problems: OJJDP's Comprehensive Gang Model*. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, Washington, DC. <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/231200.pdf>

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Spergel, I. A., and Curry, G. D. (1993). *The National Youth Gang Survey: A Research and Development Process*. In A. Goldstein and C. R. Huff (eds.), *The Gang Intervention Handbook* (pp. 359–400). Champaign, IL: Research Press.

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This partnership works to provide professionals in the field of gangs with tools that can be used in a comprehensive range of strategies to respond to street gangs, from prevention and intervention to criminal justice strategies such as suppression, prosecution, and reentry.

**Michelle Arciaga** is a senior research associate with the National Gang Center operated by the Institute for Intergovernmental Research (IIR) in Tallahassee, Florida.

**Victor Gonzalez** is the director of Prevention and Interventions Services, Mayor's Anti-Gang Office, Houston, Texas.

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