

GANG PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION STRATEGIES OF THE BOYS AND GIRLS CLUBS OF AMERICA

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ABSTRACT

This article summarizes an evaluation of youth gang prevention and intervention programs across 33 Boys and Girls Clubs which were designed to implement strategies and techniques for reaching and mainstreaming at-risk youth or those on the fringe of gang involvement. Thirty Boys and Girls Club sites were funded as prevention program sites (of which eight received additional funds to develop youth gang prevention consortiums) and three were funded as intervention program sites.

This study, conducted from April 1991 to February 1992, was designed as a process evaluation, summarizing what happened across the club sites. The information collected and used for evaluation contained basic demographic descriptors, indicators of at-risk factors, and indicators of school performance. The evaluation was based on data obtained from case management information collected by Club personnel at all sites, on-site observations, and interviews by members of the research team.

The evaluation centered on actual program implementation in order to draw inferences concerning the degree to which gang prevention and intervention program objectives were achieved. In addition, the descriptive data suggests that some outcome objectives were achieved; however, the evaluation was not designed as a scientific outcome study. Overall, the results of this evaluation demonstrate that these programs were effective in reaching targeted youth and that some of the efforts implemented deserve consideration by those planning future prevention and/or intervention undertakings.

INTRODUCTION

The constellation of problems related to gang and group delinquency in the United States is growing. Besides direct costs to victims resulting from violent and property offenses, "the community as a whole" is paying significant monies for law enforcement, trials and other judicial proceedings, secure confinement, and correctional programs (Thompson, Jason 1988). Further, large numbers of America's youth, especially in public housing and inner city areas, are slipping into a quagmire from which return is extremely difficult.

With inner city conditions rapidly deteriorating, hundreds of thousands of young persons face desperate and largely hopeless lives. The problems one sees in inner city areas are coming home to all Americans either directly or indirectly as they emerge geographically, economically, politically and socially. Factors such as unemployment, under-employment, poverty, and the like have at one time or another been linked to increasing or decreasing rates of crime, delinquency, and gang activity. Often unable to subsist within the legal economy, many take refuge in the illegal subeconomy - engaging in prostitution, gambling, drugs and the like - and often express frustration in acts of expressive and instrumental violence as witnessed in the recent resurgence of youth gang activity (Hagedorn 1988; Huff 1990; Jankowski 1991; Klein, Maxson 1989; Vigil, Yun 1990). As a result, members of the underclass comprise the bulk of juvenile and adult institutionalized

populations. Thus, a significant number of American youth, especially inner city youth, are "at risk." In a country where tens of millions partake of abundance, these youth live in conditions where their access to developmental opportunities is much different than that of their more well-situated "peers."

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES: THE ROLE OF MEDIATING STRUCTURES

The problems of inner city poverty and deterioration are long-standing and complex. Obviously, attempts to address inner city conditions must proceed in several dimensions. Over the last several decades two strategic approaches have predominated in efforts to deal with inner city gang problems. As pointed out by Spergel and Curry,

the predominant strategy for dealing with the gang problem during the 1950's and 1960's was social intervention, whereas the predominant strategy during the 1970's and 1980's was suppression. (1993)

Elements of both strategies have carried forward into the 1990's (very heavy on suppression); however, there is increasing recognition of the need for strategic initiatives of a different sort.

As Spergel and Curry also inform us,

analysis of the data from the National Youth Gang Survey [Spergel 1991] produced little evidence of the efficacy of either approach [social intervention or suppression] as a primary

strategy for either chronic or emerging gang problem cities. (Spergel, Curry 1993)

Considering this, Spergel and Curry point to the need for "appropriate and complementary strategies," especially

the need for various community organizations, including law enforcement and youth agencies, to play important interactive and collective roles in both emerging and chronic problem cities. (1993)

Spergel's and Curry's analysis essentially results in a call for community mobilization. Introducing the basic notion that increasing gang activity may signify "a progressive weakening of the basic institutions of socialization, especially the family, but also the schools and other community organizations," they indicate that

secondary institutions in the community, particularly police, schools, and youth agencies must assume additional support and control functions that perhaps formerly were fulfilled by families. (1993)

In the image conveyed, there would be a need for a coordinated collective effort which may constitute a strategic dimension of initiatives to transcend suppression and/or social intervention "to nurture a coherent community in which problematic or at-risk youth can play a constructive and meaningful role."

More than fifty years ago, F.M. Thrasher (1927) described the work of voluntary organizations, such as ethnic clubs, churches, and others, in helping to shape the behaviors of gang members. Attention to the roles and potential of various primary and secondary organizations may have been diminished over time by emphases on mega-initiatives of relatively short-term duration. Studies and analyses of what has occurred/is occurring in inner city areas lead to the understanding that when essential primary institutions deteriorate, external mega-initiatives may miss, or perhaps more importantly, may misspecify their targets. A void is then present which must be filled in order to "carry out those functions critical to the youth socialization process," (Spergel, Curry 1993) as well as to integrate efforts and essentially create a more stable, if not empowered, neighborhood or community.

The notion of "mediating structures"

has been around for some time (Berger, Neuhaus 1977). Applied to consideration of 1990's strategic initiatives, one is directed to search for mechanisms by which support may be channeled to fill the void, utilizing organizations which contribute stability to neighborhoods or communities, provide an interface with larger institutions, and have the capacity to link local needs to initiatives of promise.

WEED AND SEED

While there have been some efforts at developing mediating structures to address the inner cities dilemma, little has been done with the focus and scope of Operation Weed and Seed. Operation Weed and Seed has involved a multi-dimensional strategy with a primary emphasis on addressing the problems of gangs, drugs, violence, crime and community recovery from drug problems and violent gang activity. The thrust of the overall strategy was based upon an awareness that in various communities a coordinated comprehensive approach was needed. The idea was to form partnerships among governmental and private organizations to significantly reduce criminal activity (the "weed" part) and promote community recovery (the "seed" part).

The four strategies of Weed and Seed included:

1. suppression — enforcement, adjudication, prosecution, and supervision targeting those "who account for a disproportionate percentage of criminal activity."
2. community-oriented policing — providing a "bridge" between law enforcement activities and "neighborhood reclamation and revitalization activities."
3. prevention, intervention, intervention, and treatment — focusing on "youth services, school programs, community and social programs, and support groups."
4. neighborhood reclamation and revitalization — focusing on "economic development activities designed to strengthen legitimate community institutions."

The overall idea was to concentrate resources in designated areas to provide a comprehensive approach.

BOYS AND GIRLS CLUBS

As noted in a recent report:

For more than 130 years the Boys Clubs of

America has been working to prevent juvenile delinquency and develop productive citizens and leaders among our Nation's most vulnerable youth...The Clubs provide youth with alternatives to the streets that include activities that develop their sense of belonging, competence, usefulness and influence. (Sweet 1991)

With over 1400 local clubs operating in every major metropolitan area, Boys and Girls Clubs of America (BGCA) was an ideal partner to Weed and Seed efforts. Clubs typically provide recreational programming for youth as well as other services such as tutorial programs; field trips; craft programs; mentoring positive enhancements, such as SMART MOVES (a programming strategy which provides focused group discussions tailored to teens concerning such topics as drug use, sexual relations, and other matters); and the like. Moreover, BGCA has proven to be effective in servicing disadvantaged youth, with local club facilities often located adjacent to or within public housing (Feyerherm, Pope, Lovell 1992).

An evaluation conducted by researchers from Columbia University and the American Health Foundation (Schinke, Cole, Orlandi 1991) noted the following:

Social support services are critical for youth in public housing. Yet comprehensive and sensitive services for young people in public housing are practically nonexistent. Public housing communities urgently need the kind of attention, community organization, and carefully designed intervention programs that Boys and Girls Clubs offer.

The emphasis must be on coordinated efforts at community organization and recovery.

Similarly, a 1986 Louis and Harris Associates survey underscored the fact the BGCA have a positive impact on our nation's youth, especially those from disadvantaged families. Club experiences lay a strong foundation for success in later life. As noted by Sweet (1991), Boys and Girls Clubs has a lengthy and "strong record of positive involvement with children at particular risk - those in declining neighborhoods and in public housing..." As part of Weed and Seed, BGCA engaged in a targeted outreach program in order to reach those youth at risk of becoming involved in gangs and gang-related activity (eg. drugs, violence, and crime generally). The results reported

here represent an evaluation of this targeted outreach program. The main aims were to 1) assess the implementation of the programs, including a determination of efforts which worked well and could be replicated, as well as those efforts which fell short of expectations (problem areas) and 2) assess, to the degree possible, the programs' effectiveness.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology utilized here was designed to accomplish the objectives noted above and consisted of a "process" evaluation. As Patton (1980) observed:

Process evaluations are aimed at elucidating and understanding the internal dynamics of program operations. Process evaluations focus on the following kinds of questions: What are the factors that come together to make the program what it is? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the program? How are the clients brought into the program and how do they move through the program once they are participants? What is the nature of staff-client interactions?

Central to a process evaluation is a detailed description of program operations which is ideally suited to a qualitative design. Thus, the assessment relied heavily on qualitative interviews and observations, which were supplemented by a limited quantitative component involving data drawn from case records.

BGCA PROGRAM OPERATIONS

The BGCA project involved 30 Clubs selected and funded as gang prevention sites, with a commitment to provide case management and services for 35 youth. Through a special grant from the Office of Health and Human Services, eight of these sites were selected to network with other community organizations or youth gang consortia to reach an additional 100 at-risk youth through community-wide events. In each of the sites *prevention* meant implementation of strategies to deter youth primarily aged 7 to 11, from becoming involved in gang or gang related activities. Three additional Clubs were selected as intervention sites. These Clubs received substantially more funding and were to develop and implement strategies to serve at risk youth (typically those on the fringes of gangs or "wanna-bes") in the primary target ages of 12 to 16. At least 50 youth were to be served in

Table 1: Gender and Race/Ethnicity Distribution of Program Youth

	Prevention		Consortium		Intervention		All Programs	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Gender								
Female	251	29	196	29	71	19	518	27
Male	593	68	468	70	301	81	1362	71
Missing	33	4	4	1	0	0	37	2
Total	877	100	668	100	372	100	1917	100
Race/Ethnicity								
White	94	11	130	19	25	7	249	13
African American	593	68	361	54	152	41	1106	58
Hispanic	114	13	151	23	167	45	432	23
Asian	18	2	25	4	22	6	65	3
Native American	0	0	8	1	1	0	9	0
Other Races	3	0	3	0	2	1	8	0
Missing	55	6	0	0	3	1	58	3
Total	877	100	668	100	372	100	1917	100

each gang intervention site.

All the participating local Clubs were selected through a process which included submission of an application for funding and a detailed plan for implementation. A committee comprised of directors of BGCA reviewed the proposals and made the actual decisions concerning which local Clubs would be funded. As implemented, the BGCA efforts fall within the general rubric of prevention.

Prevention and Consortium Programs

Fifteen of the prevention and consortium sites were included in the evaluation. For the prevention sites, the evaluation was based in part on data obtained from case management information collected by Club personnel at each site. All available program records were used to provide an assessment as comprehensive as possible. Using the case management data, analysis was conducted to provide information on demographic characteristics of youth served. In addition, site visits to selected programs were accomplished. On-site observation was combined with interviews of various persons arranged through the auspices of the local Clubs. These interviews were conducted with program directors, Club staff directly involved with prevention programming, program participants, school officials, local justice officials, and parents when possible. The evaluation centered on actual program implementation in order to determine strengths of implementation and areas of implementation needing improvement, and, draw inferences concerning the degree to which

program plans were achieved. The consortium sites were approached in the same manner - one visit was made to each of the selected sites by one member of the research team.

Intervention Programs

All three intervention sites were included in the evaluation. As with the prevention programs, available case management information was analyzed to provide demographic information, indicators of at-risk factors such as past and current school performance, as well as gang and justice system involvement. In addition, each of the intervention sites was visited twice by two members of the research team. Again, on-site observations were combined with interviews of various persons, as indicated above. In both the prevention and intervention program interviews, the evaluators use semi-structured interview schedules to obtain information on such issues as:

- the nature of the gang problem in the area
- club activities as part of the prevention/intervention efforts
- relationship to other Club programs and activities
- efforts in mainstreaming of participants and, among other items,
- relationships with other youth-serving agencies.

Beyond this, interviews were conducted with program participants for the three intervention programs using semi-structured interview schedules developed by the evaluation team.

Table 2: Factors Placing Program Youth at Risk of Gang Involvement

At-Risk Factors	Prevention		Consortium		Intervention		All Programs	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
"Wanna-Be"	85	10	0	0	19	5	105	5
Family Gang Involved	5	1	0	0	36	10	41	2
School Behavioral Problem	338	39	422	63	33	9	793	41
Failing School	309	35	246	37	37	10	592	31
Truant	133	15	136	20	15	4	284	15
Runaway	27	3	5	1	66	18	122	6
Abuse/Neglect	164	19	64	10	4	1	232	12
Substance Abuse	26	3	5	1	52	14	83	4
Parental Substance Abuse	177	20	98	15	4	1	279	15
In Custody	43	5	63	9	94	25	200	10
Other	84	10	113	17	98	26	295	15

Table 3: Discipline and Rewards for Program Youth

Disciplinary Actions	Prevention		Consortium		Intervention		All Programs	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Disciplinary Actions	229	26	121	18	7	2	357	19
Accomplishments								
In-Club	421	48	192	29	23	6	636	33
Outside	117	13	79	12	11	3	207	11
Volunteer	236	27	153	23	102	27	491	26
Other	51	6	3	0	183	49	237	12

FINDINGS

Selected Descriptive Information

A total of 1,917 youth were served by the project: 877 were served by the 22 prevention sites, 668 by the eight prevention consortium sites, and 372 by the three intervention sites. Schools served as the largest referral source (45%), followed by youth walk-ins (23%), juvenile justice agencies (9%), and youth agencies (9%). As defined in the program design, the prevention and consortium sites served youth between ages 7 and 11 (98%), while the intervention sites focused on older youth (85% were 12 through 18 years of age).

A substantial number of girls participated in the program, especially at the prevention and consortium sites (29% of all participants). At the three intervention sites, girls made up 19 percent of the total served. The greatest number of youth served by the project were African-American (58%), followed by Hispanic (23%) and Caucasian youth (13%). Asian youth accounted for 3 percent, while Native Americans and others made up 1 percent.

The greatest at-risk factors identified were school-related. Forty-one percent of the

youth exhibited behavioral problems in school, 31 percent were failing school, and 15 percent were chronically truant. Parental substance abuse and abuse/neglect were next in significance (15% and 12% respectively), followed by "other" factors at 15 percent (defined by Club staff as environment/neighborhood factors).

Once enrolled at the Clubs, most youth attended regularly. Ninety percent of the youth attended once a week or more, with 26 percent attending daily, 19 percent attending half of the available hours, and 19 percent attending at least twice a week. One third received recognition for in-club accomplishments, while 26 percent received recognition for volunteer work outside of the Club. Project staff used other agencies as referral sources, with 41 percent of all youth involved in the project receiving some form of referral to one or more community agencies.

Referrals to outside agencies for other services were highest among youth at intervention sites (73% of all intervention youth), followed by consortium sites (56%) and prevention sites (15%). It would be expected that the intervention sites would require the

greatest level of referral services due to the focus of the efforts.

Although this was a process evaluation, the descriptive data did suggest trends in the educational arena. School behavior showed the greatest level of improvement among the school risk factors, with 48 percent of the participants showing improvement; the highest (62%) were among the consortium sites where the established relationships with the schools was the strongest. Over one-third of the youth showed improved grades and another one-third improved their attendance. Less than six percent of the youth showed declines in any of the school risk factors during program involvement.

Strengths in Program Implementation

BGCA's and OJJDP's expectations of "success" for the various programs centered on accomplishing networking activities, actually implementing the specified efforts, recruiting and retaining the targeted at-risk youth, maintaining case management records, and attempting to "mainstream" the targeted youth during the program time period in order to 1) bring them together with other Club members for positive associations and 2) encourage the targeted youth to remain involved in the Clubs and other positive activities beyond the project time period. The various programs were envisioned as "demonstrations," with a relatively short-term focus and a primary interest in implementation. Little attention was given to conceptualizing, operationalizing, or measuring effects beyond those already described, or to any follow-up other than the one-shot evaluation immediately following program implementation and termination.

All programs met their overall goals to serve the designated numbers of targeted youth. This required each participating Club to staff its effort (for the prevention and consortium programs this generally meant reallocating time and duties for existing staff, and for the intervention efforts this meant both reallocating time and duties for existing staff and hiring new staff), engage in initial coordination with schools and other local agencies, and engage in recruiting targeted youth. As noted earlier, schools were the sources from which the largest number of youth were recruited. Across programs, recruitment was a program strength. Specific efforts varied, but most involved identifying at-risk youth directly through liaison with school or other agency

personnel; then contacting youth and parents, parent, or responsible adult; explaining the program and participation in the program; and formally enrolling those youth who desired to participate and whose parent(s) or responsible adult(s) consented. The structured, formal recruitment process supported directly the notion of targeted outreach and was a key feature of all programs.

Retention of youth in the programs was excellent over the project time period. More than ninety percent of those initially enrolled remained officially enrolled throughout the project period. As noted above, however, a sizable percentage (36%) attended sporadically, while a smaller percentage (26%) attended each day, 19 percent attended regularly and more than half of the available hours, and 19 percent attended regularly and approximately twice per week. In all programs, staff attempted both to motivate the targeted youth and to promote attendance through incentives. These incentives included awards and recognition based on accumulating hours and/or points for various activities, as well as other incentives such as special parties for targeted youth (e.g., pizza parties). Staff also sought to interest and motivate the targeted youth by mainstreaming them into general Club activities.

Mainstreaming, or integrating the targeted youth into the general Club population and activities, was an essential feature of all programs and was a strength of implementation. Mainstreaming required program staff to balance provision of specified activities to the targeted youth with ensuring that the youth could be integrated without identification as targeted youth. Across the programs, staff were sensitive to these requirements and generally were able to meet them by 1) keeping records separate and confidential to the extent possible and 2) providing explanations to targeted youth and other Club youth as necessary. Mainstreaming was essential, as well, in extending program resources. All programs utilized general Club resources in this way to supplement program funding. Actually, absent this strategy it would have been very difficult for most Clubs to provide sufficient activities and staffing to operate the programs. With this strategy, the efforts were viable.

Networking, building or utilizing relationships with other organizations and agencies, was a strong point in all programs, especially those designated to build a consortium.

Networking is an integral feature of Boys and Girls Clubs operations on a continuing basis, and it was not surprising to find that Club staff were skilled and knowledgeable in this area. Each Club was able to capitalize on established relationships, and many formed new sets of relationships relevant to their specified efforts. Across all sites there were strong efforts to establish or utilize existing relationships with schools (especially those immediately adjacent to the housing areas in which targeted youth resided and those they attended), law enforcement, juvenile court and juvenile probation agencies, and others. In some instances, the local Clubs were the only viable alternatives available within the program area. Even in these instances, staff coordinated and shared information with other organizations.

Eight programs were to build consortium efforts. All focused on building partnerships, especially with schools and other organizations capable of working together with the local Club to deliver activities and services and/or to directly support activities and services. Typically, program partnerships with schools involved development of a school liaison to assist in monitoring progress and determining needs for after-school tutorials and educational enhancements. The educational enhancements would involve such activities as computer-assisted learning and other learning activities to supplement classroom activities. The central idea would be to provide interesting, motivational learning activities which extended and supported classroom activities rather than simply retracing classroom activities. This focus was important and participants reported that their interest in both school and after-school learning activities increased as a result.

There were several other notable partnership ventures. Two were exemplary. In one of these, a local Club joined with an element of the United States Army from a nearby military installation to create and implement a leadership-training program for targeted youth. The program included a ten-week cycle of weekend instruction and activities in which military personnel provided seminar-type classroom activities and outdoor-skills activities such as map reading, compass orienting, and outdoor overnight camping and learning activities. The military personnel also obtained the participation of cadets from a nearby university R.O.T.C. detachment to act as volunteers at the local

Club for an array of additional activities. This partnership deserves careful consideration because of the possibilities for future efforts to bring to bear resources not usually included in designing or planning for gang prevention programs.

As well, the second exemplary effort involved a creative and very useful partnership. The local Club joined with an advertising agency in the area to develop what eventually became an award-winning print and television ad campaign against gangs. The ad agency provided guidance, technical expertise, and production facilities, as well as commitment of individuals from the agency to work with the targeted youth. The targeted youth creatively designed both the print ads and the television ads (30-second and 1-minute commercials) and were the actors in the television ads. These ads were powerful and showed the creative capabilities of the youth, given guidance and opportunity. It would be a large understatement to point out that the participants were motivated by this partnership — the targeted youth, the agency personnel, and the Club staff. Such partnerships may be possible in many areas and deserve careful consideration by those designing or planning gang prevention and intervention efforts.

Among other specified efforts across programs, basketball leagues and trips beyond central city neighborhoods were strengths of implementation. Boys and Girls Clubs operate with the rubric of recreation to provide activities designed to interest youth as the prerequisite for engaging youth with developmental opportunities. Basketball leagues were a staple across the programs, and these were designed to serve two obvious purposes. They were organized and operated to provide alternatives to the streets at times of day when youth typically are "hanging out" on the streets, and they were aimed at maintaining the participation of targeted youth by providing an activity of special interest to many of the program participants. All evidence indicated that both these purposes were achieved for most participating youth across the programs.

Trips beyond central city neighborhoods were another staple across programs. Those familiar with America's inner cities realize that many youth do not travel beyond their neighborhoods to see directly what many more well-situated youth take for granted. Trips to museums, state and national parks, and other places of interest were utilized to maintain the

interest of participants and to expand their first-hand knowledge of what things are like beyond their own usual horizons. The broader aim was to provide youth the beginnings of a way to locate themselves beyond a central city neighborhood. The project period was limited, but such activities should receive careful consideration by those designing more long-term efforts.

The intervention programs were implemented by three Clubs in which the usual scope of operations included reaching teenage youth. Even among Boys and Girls Clubs, reaching and retaining teens is known to be difficult, requiring experienced staff and efforts tailored to teens and the local situations in which teens are living. Not all Clubs extend their efforts to include teens. Among the noted difficulties is that of concurrently providing programming of interest to younger children and programming which will hold the interest of teens. Also among noted difficulties is the matter of providing space, staff, and time sufficient to provide programming and enough separation so that teens (especially) and younger children feel a distinction in age and activities.

The three intervention programs were very strong. The participating Clubs employed combinations of established programming (e.g., SMART MOVES) and creative activities of interest to teens. A normal policy of Boys and Girls Clubs is implementation of a guiding principle stressing that a Club is to be a safe haven from violence and any other undesirable conditions in the surrounding environment. The intervention programs were located in areas where actual gang activity and other problems, such as instrumental use of youth by adults as participants in drug dealing, were pervasive. Under sometimes difficult conditions, staff in these programs had maintained the Clubs as safe havens. The value of this situation is immeasurable, but its importance must be understood. Just as it is ridiculous to expect hungry children to function and learn at full capacity, it is unreasonable to expect youth to receive positive messages in situations which may be volatile. The intangible "respect" must be present. Across all the programs, staff observed and implemented the safe haven principle and adhered to the notion of "respect." With the intervention programs and attempts to deal with teens, establishing the threshold conditions appeared to be of great importance.

A final strength of note in the implementation of these efforts was the commitment of the various Clubs' staff to retaining the targeted youth beyond the project period. In each program evaluated, this aim was expressed and actions were observed which showed the research team that the commitment was genuine. With no follow-up and a one-shot evaluation of limited duration it is impossible to determine the extent to which this aim was fulfilled. Boys and Girls Clubs have demonstrated their long term commitment to central city areas by being there for the long haul. "Programs" come and go, usually with limited project time periods of 12 months, 18 months, 24 months, or whatever. "Programs" often are implemented by organizations which come and go. Central city residents who are the objects of such "programs" understand this, realize that expectations may be created and then ended on project termination day, and often are reluctant to become involved. Long term commitment is necessary. The long term commitment of Boys and Girls Clubs to be there and continue their efforts beyond a discrete project period, to undertake more projects, and to genuinely attempt to retain youth in a developmental strategy provided the platform for this project and was the main strength of implementation.

Difficulties in Implementation

Each of the program staffs faced difficulties unique to their efforts. Most of these were overcome in creative ways. There were several ubiquitous difficulties in implementing these projects, and not all could be overcome. Four of these deserve direct attention by those designing or planning future efforts. These are not presented here to diminish the efforts of the Boys and Girls Clubs; rather, they are intended here to bring reality to thinking about such efforts.

First, each of the programs was required to keep extensive records regarding the targeted youth, their involvement, and their progress. Some programs managed to do more than others, but all programs had difficulty with this requirement. None of the programs had the luxury of providing staff personnel whose main duty would be record-keeping. Program staff all had an array of duties, and few program staff were assigned only to duties involving the specified project. Beyond this, program staff had to cover more than one usual shift during days at work and were

required to have some means for monitoring activities and progress of 35 or more targeted youth who might at any given time be involved in activities in different places, perhaps supervised by staff or persons other than the program staff. The expectations for record-keeping, given the program staffing, were unrealistic. The data recorded were minimal in most cases, although program staff made genuine efforts. Consequently, data regarding the youth was inconsistent. Those planning future efforts should attend to developing case management realistically in line with staffing capacity. If there is to be evaluation, evaluators or the evaluation should be included in planning with the aim of specifying essential data collection relevant to the questions to be asked.

Second, all programs experienced difficulties in obtaining involvement from the parents of participating youth. At best, the involvement of parents for the duration of the project was very limited (i.e., a very few parents were involved consistently for the duration, most often where they were included as members of a program advisory committee). At worst, parental involvement was very limited and sporadic or nonexistent. Staff across the programs employed a variety of approaches to enlist and retain the involvement of parents. These approaches included home visits (which require a large amount of time for staff); regular meals held at Club facilities with parents and, most often, the participating youth invited, and, among other approaches, attempts to include a role for parents in ongoing program activities. Parental involvement is important, especially so because youth need encouragement and conditions at home which support positive activities taking place elsewhere. The problem of obtaining parental involvement is not unique to the programs undertaken by the Clubs. The problem is ubiquitous, one to be faced in the implementation of any effort targeting youth.

Third, across the programs there was one particular difficulty with school liaison. Liaisons were established, and these were a strength. However, those planning future efforts may expect to find, as with these programs, that issues of privacy and confidentiality of records require creativity and cooperation of school officials in providing substantive information for monitoring and determining progress of participating youth. This was not insurmountable for the Clubs in program implementation but did require development of viable working

agreements. This situation deserves careful consideration as a practical reality issue in designing efforts which require information on school progress.

Fourth, in some locations the Boys and Girls Club implementing the program was the primary resource in the area and was unaffected by other organizations and other efforts in its implementation. In some areas, "turf" became an issue and required the program staff to negotiate working agreements with other groups or organizations also operating programs or implementing efforts. With some groups, the working agreements required periodic negotiation and relations were often strained. Turf was an issue in regard to some resident associations in some housing developments where these resident associations wanted actual control of program resources and decisions or where these associations were committed to other ventures and the implementation of the Club's program was not initially welcomed. Also, some Clubs experienced a situation in which several organizations were all attempting to implement funded efforts targeting the same inner city population and were all attempting to make claims on or obtain resources from the same set of local agencies (i.e., schools, law enforcement, housing authority, among others.). Where these difficulties arose, program staff eventually overcame them, but these affected the nature and levels of implementation in some instances. Those designing or planning future efforts should attend to the context and politics of implementation in particular areas.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The overall conclusion of this evaluation effort was that the youth gang prevention and early intervention initiative of the Boys and Girls Clubs of America was both sound and viable in its approach. The neighborhoods and communities where many of the 1,450 Clubs are located, as well as the nature of the Clubs' programming, place them in position to serve the needs of youth at risk of gang involvement. All sites evaluated dealt with youth who were clearly at risk of gang involvement. As planned, the prevention sites clearly targeted a younger population, in which the risk factors were more along the lines of early warning signals (poor school performance, discipline problems, etc.). The intervention programs dealt with an older population, with a greater number of youth

with justice system contacts, substance abuse histories, and the like.

The level of attendance and involvement served as a clear indicator of the ability of Clubs to provide viable programming and activities which attract at-risk youth, bring them into the Clubs, and maintain their interest and participation in regular Club programming. Boys and Girls Clubs of America stands out as an exemplar of a national network of youth-serving organizations with the commitment to a nationwide offensive to counteract the problem of youth gangs in America. Given the scope of the gang problem nationally, and the need to reach youth before they become involved in gangs, more comprehensive, long-term efforts should be initiated utilizing organizations such as Boys and Girls Clubs as the committed core.

This evaluation showed the need for long term efforts rather than short term programs. It also showed the need for multi-stage "full service" efforts in which youth are given a commitment from early years through teenage years, maintaining contact and providing developmental opportunities to escape the conditions in which they started. This requires changes in national priorities and in the prevailing strategy of funding many programs of short duration. Coordinated efforts with national scope, flexible enough to be tailored to local needs, with a "full service" developmental approach are necessary. This requires organizations such as BGCA and the affiliated Clubs - many more of them, and a reassessment of the role played by federal agencies. If, as a nation, we are not going to take the steps necessary to reverse the deterioration of inner city areas, then we at least must make it a national priority to support and expand the set of organizations and efforts in there for the long haul.

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