

Gang Reduction and Intervention Task Force (GRIT)  
Village Meeting Notes  
March 16, 2022

Call to order: 12:00 p.m. Twenty-two attending.

Topic: The intersection between homelessness and gang activity

Speakers: Lee Murdock, Director of Homeless Network of Yakima County; Mark James, Executive Director of Rod's House

*At the end of these notes, a pdf of the PowerPoint Lee and Mark used is attached, with more information that will not be duplicated here.*

Lee and Mark: To discuss homelessness and gang involvement, we need the facts, and there has not been enough recent research to confidently come to any conclusions. We need more data.

Lee: In 2012, there was a Gang Assessment survey done in the county, based on the OJJDP model. Great partnership with schools, able to survey over 4,000 students.

In Yakima County, many of the risk factors for gang involvement also are risks for homelessness.

Parents say kids join gangs for protection.

The annual survey of homeless rarely includes under 18s, which means there is not enough data to draw conclusions. Homelessness among young adults (18- 25) rose in 2021.

When asked, "What contributes most to your homelessness?" Family crisis and breakup is consistently a top response.

Mark: On average, 18% of visits to resource center are under 18, which means that about 64 individuals were served last year, out of 380 served overall.

We found that we were interacting with people coming from gangs, and we used to discourage this identification. We didn't accept red or blue clothing. No use of gang signs was allowed at the house. We learned that this created a barrier, as some people did not feel welcome. Now we do not record gang affiliation. Even asking the question may raise suspicion in the people we serve. That suspicion may disrupt our ability to provide services. We now focus on our mission, which is the delivery of stable housing.

National data:

Lee: From 2016, Society for Social Work and Research—there is an Invisible population of homeless who leave services to join gangs. These people are not counted. Gangs provide perceived support. Transitioning out of gang is difficult with no housing.

Mark: 2003 study shows there is abundant research on gang activity, although not on how it intersects with homelessness. It does show the risk factors of gang-involved friends, and the loosening of social ties. If relationships include friends in gangs, gang involvement is likely. When a young person is ejected from their home, that breaks social ties, which puts them also at-risk for gang involvement.

We need research on whether we could address gang involvement concerns by addressing housing and the home situation.

Lee: Homeless individuals are often the targets of attacks by gangs, but this is anecdotal.

Conclusions:

- being homeless or unstably housed makes youth/young adults more vulnerable to gang recruitment
- Transitioning away from a gang is more difficult without stable housing
- Local data around gangs is dated and needs to be researched.

Lee: this is the situation in Yakima County: We are in top 2% of counties with children under 18. Only 90 counties in the country have a lower education level. We are in an area of high intensity drug trafficking, and a high rate of poverty. What works in LA may not work here. Support for housing, education, and employment are the key ways to reduce gang involvement.

Audience remarks: Kids are being drawn into gangs through social media these days. Project Safe Neighborhood had a gang survey about three years ago, showing that there are about 3,000 affiliated locally. Does not address homeless population. We need support for youth leaving prison who want to leave the gangs. The sub-culture of gang activity includes direction from incarcerated shot-callers. There is no neutral zone—Rod's House and Madison House are not neutral—to gangs, they are opportunities.

Lee: GRIT can provide ongoing partnership and communication. I would love to see more research.

Mark: We are here to help anyone aged 13-24. We need data! It is what justifies the work to funders. Where are juveniles going once they leave the court system? We do not collect this information.

We need to know what we are dealing with. We need to be able to distinguish between active versus affiliate gang membership. We need to think more carefully about what we can be doing right now to intervene.

The meeting ended at 1:01 p.m.

The next GRIT Village meeting: May 18, 2022, **in-person**. Chief Murray will review the history of Project Safe Neighborhood in Yakima. The location will be announced.

Notes submitted by Ann Dibble, DRC

## Yakima County Gang Commission



- ▶ 2012 Yakima County Gang Assessment
  - ▶ Utilized the OJJDP Model
    - ▶ Community Mobilization
    - ▶ Opportunities Provision
    - ▶ Social Intervention
    - ▶ Suppression
    - ▶ Organizational Change and Development

## 2012 Yakima County Gang Assessment



- ▶ During the assessment process a variety of surveys were conducted to target audiences:
  - ▶ 73 Community Leader Surveys
  - ▶ 524 Community Resident Surveys
  - ▶ 49 Youth Serving Organizations
  - ▶ 38 Gang Member Surveys
  - ▶ 58 Parents of Gang Members Surveys
  - ▶ 4,440 Student Surveys
  - ▶ 196 School Staff Perceptions Surveys

# 2012 Yakima County Gang Assessment

► Key Findings:

1. Yakima County has an environment that contains multiple risk factors for gang involvement including a culture of poverty which is magnified by single parenting, low adult educational attainment, and high seasonal unemployment rates...
2. Yakima County has a high rate of at-risk youth with multiple risk factors for gang involvement including higher rates of school failure, a high teen birth rate, suicide and suicide attempts, depression, illegal drug use, alcohol use, and low neighborhood attachment....
3. Yakima County contains a multitude of micro cultures among segments of the population as illustrated by the wide disparities in race and ethnicity, income, crime, and educational attainment...
4. A lack of common definitions and criteria for Gang Membership and Gang Activity made the analysis of Gang Crime difficult.



## Top Reasons why gang activity exist

Comparing responses to the same question shows the difference in perceived causes for gang activity

Community Leaders	• Family/Friends in Gang
Community Members	• Friends or Family in Gang
Gang Members	• Poverty
Parents of Gang Members	• Poverty

## Parents were asked why their children had joined a gang

Comparing responses to the same question shows the difference in perceived causes for gang activity

Protection	• 21%
Desire for money, power, popularity...	• 19%
Not Sure	• 19%
Family, Friends	• 16%
Bullied	• 14%
Bored	• 5%
Parent Left	• 5%





- ## Rod's House – Responses and Roles
- ▶ Previously, policies were in place to avoid gang influence
    - ▶ Those policies created too much disturbance
  - ▶ Minimal intervention approach
    - ▶ Case managers use a "don't ask, don't tell" approach
    - ▶ No identified reason for collecting information
  - ▶ RH aligns with other orgs in Yakima to support violence prevention
    - ▶ Yakima School District has had a dress code banning red or blue
    - ▶ RH will not accept red or blue clothing

## Society for Social Work and Research

**Results** First experience of homelessness co-occurs with gang involvement;

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Gangs provide services and perceived support to homeless youth

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Gun and weapon involvement, violence and death are prevalent experiences among gang involved homeless youth

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Ambivalent attitude toward gangs

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Transitioning out of gangs as a unique challenge for homeless youth

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## Other Notes on Gang Involvement and Youth Homelessness

- ▶ There is abundant research on gang involvement
  - ▶ Males are more likely to be gang members than females
  - ▶ Parents are a significant influence on delinquent behavior
  - ▶ Youth who have weak ties to social institutions are more likely to become delinquent
- ▶ There is not much research on gang involvement among homeless youth
  - ▶ We would love to say better housing is directly related to gang involvement, but there is not sufficient evidence to back that claim

## Key Understandings

- ▶ We believe that being homeless or unstably housed makes a Youth/Young Adult more vulnerable to Gang Recruitment
- ▶ Research clearly indicated that transitioning out of gang involvement is more difficult without adequate housing
- ▶ Local Data around Gangs is dated; we recommend both a Countywide Approach to Gangs and a new assessment which takes the intersect of homelessness and gang involvement into consideration