

BEYOND YOUTH CUSTODY

RESETTLING GANG-INVOLVED YOUNG PEOPLE

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Custody

Gang Members in Prison

- ❑ North American and UK research indicates that most gang-involved prisoners come with a history of more serious criminality and violence, poor educational attainment and a patchy work record (Griffin & Hepburn, 2006, Ward & Maruna, 2007, Shapland et al, 2012).
- ❑ Once inside, they tend to affiliate with members of their own neighbourhood gang, or a new gang that has formed in prison.
- ❑ They are also more likely to engage in 'institutional misconduct', including violence, extortion and the sale of drugs and other contraband.
- ❑ These violations tend to be dealt with by solitary confinement which prevents these inmates from attending workshops where they might gain new skills, or educational programmes that will help them to take up training, legitimate employment or further education upon release (Griffin & Hepburn, 2006).

Prison Violence

- ❑ The gang violence in Feltham, Isis and Cookham Wood YOIs calls into question whether concentrating gang-involved young people in particular jails/YOIs makes sense.
- ❑ Research suggests that prison violence tends to be 'imported' by gang members (De Lisi et al, 2004) and that previously uninvolved young people become gang-involved for self protection (Pitts, 2008).
- ❑ It also suggests that imprisonment consolidates and extends gang-related drug-dealing networks.
- ❑ Cuts in prison staff are believed to be a significant contributory factor to this violence

Re-settlement

Homecoming

- When gang members are released and return to their neighbourhoods, they often find that, because gangs are usually in a state of flux (Harding, 2014), the power relationships within and between local gangs have changed and that they cannot occupy the role they vacated when they were imprisoned.
- Moreover, the control they once exerted over territory or an illicit business may have passed to another gang member or another gang.
- There may also be an expectation from their erstwhile associates that in order to restore the respect in which they were once held, they will need to visit retribution upon those who have 'dissed' them while they have been away.

Desistance as a Process

- ❑ Research shows that desistance from crime is a process rather than an event
- ❑ Desistance from gang crime, does not necessarily mean leaving the gang, partly because continued gang involvement may well be a prerequisite of personal safety (Deane et.al,2007, Pitts, 2008, 2011)
- ❑ There are pressures on previously gang-involved 'peer mentors' working in gang-desistance programmes (Pitts, 2011). On the one hand their previous notoriety means they are accepted by their peers, they may feel that their credibility hinges upon their involvement with the gang.
- ❑ It is also difficult to leave the gang without leaving the neighbourhood and the gang members are often close friends with whom they had grown up or, indeed, their brothers or cousins.

Gang Desistance

- The available evidence identifies a number of points or situations where gang-involved young people may desist from gang crime:
 - Serious injury or 'near death' experience.
 - Death or serious injury of a friend or relative
 - Constant exposure to violence (Decker & Lauritsen, 2002).
 - Arrest and or imprisonment (Briggs, 2008)
 - A new relationship/setting up home with a partner/birth of a child
 - During the transition from school to college (Hagedorn, 1998).
 - Access to legitimate educational or vocational opportunities or starting a legitimate business.
- The one consistent finding is that age is a major determinant of desistance from crime in general and gang involvement and gang crime in particular, suggesting that most young people 'mature out' of gang involvement. (Smith et al 2005, Piquero, Farrington, & Blumstein, 2007, Harding, 2014).

It's Different for Girls

- ❑ The pathways into and out of crime are different for girls and young women. (Graham & Bowling, 1995. Bateman & Hazel, 2014a)
- ❑ Some North American studies found the major differences to be years spent in education and the presence of children (cf Sommers, et al., 1994 and Uggen and Kruttschnitt, 1998).
- ❑ Much less is known about gang-involved girls and young women however.
- ❑ 'While pregnancy is often cited as one of the reasons why women leave gangs (Nimmo, 2001), some UK research shows that so-called 'baby mothers' remain gang involved while they are pregnant and after they have given birth (Pitts, 2008, Harding, 2014).

Promoting Desistance

- ❑ One of the differences for gang-involved young people is that many will have been involved in gang-desistance programmes prior to their incarceration.
- ❑ Is not uncommon for young people to be arrested, convicted and imprisoned for gang-related offences.
- ❑ Youth workers and mentors in these programmes interviewed by Pitts (2011) emphasised the importance of project workers maintaining contact during the period of incarceration in order that the desistance work in which they had been involved would not be undermined in the prison or the YOI.
- ❑ They observed that these young people often needed additional, personalised, support during 're-entry'. Ideally from a key worker, a youth worker or peer mentor, whom they have known, trusted and kept contact with during their time' inside'.

Promoting Desistance

For other voluntary sector agencies intervening with incarcerated gang members, the key to successful and sustained intervention appears to be:

- ❑ Making contact fairly early in the young person's sentence
- ❑ Personalising that contact via hand-written letters, and visits from one identified worker, rather than printed or typed letters or brochures with a 'take it or leave it' contact address,
- ❑ For the worker to do what they say they are going to do and to give the young person regular feedback about what they are doing.
- ❑ However, successful intervention is also predicated on the effective collaboration of several different agencies and individuals and so a capacity for effective networking is a crucial element of such interventions..