



Alternatives For Youth Quarterly Newsletter

FROM THE DESK OF THE DIRECTOR: GANG INVOLVED AFY YOUTH

The Alternatives For Youth Program assists youths and their families all over Suffolk County. As the program blossoms toward it's second anniversary, one particular threat to adolescents remains consistent: GANGS.

Gangs are all over Suffolk County. They are all actively involved in recruiting new members and they have taken on newer, more dangerous approaches to recruiting our youth. They are starting with younger and younger youth and are using high tech methods such as internet chat sites.

Approximately 10-12% of the youth referred to the AFY program are involved in gangs in some way, shape or form. By the time they come into our program, they are excited about being in a gang, actively being recruited into a gang or are already a gang member.

While a majority of our gang involved AFY youth do come from Brentwood, Bay Shore, and Central Islip areas, we are also seeing an increase in gang activity on the east end of the island. This is a problem that, if anything, is growing on Long Island.

Because of all of these issues, AFY is working on creative methods to intervene and steer vulnerable youth away from gangs. Our first and immediate line of defense are the AFY Peer Specialists. The Peer Specialists have the unique ability to bond with the AFY youth on a different level. The Peer Specialists act as a positive role model for the gang involved youth and have the ability to influence the youth in a positive direction while bonding with him or her.

The AFY Case Manager in the meantime, looks for longer term solutions to assist the gang involved youth. Often times, these youth join a gang because they have just "given up" on themselves. Through individual and family counseling, substance abuse treatment and assistance in school, the seeds are planted to give the youth the opportunity to change.

Gang involved youth are particularly resistant to want to change. But the two-pronged approach of the AFY Case Manager and the AFY Peer Specialist is effective in beginning the process of change for the youth.

Once the youth is given the chance to see that there are positive alternatives out there, they will often be open to trying something different besides life in a gang. This is accomplished through the referrals made by the AFY Case Manager and with the careful guidance of a mentor through the AFY Peer Specialist. Once the door is opened, the opportunities are limitless.

Rick Wolf
AFY Program Director



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WE'RE ON THE WEB!
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DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

What are gangs and why do youth join them?

A gang can be three or more people involved in activities that instill fear and intimidation in the community – often the activities can be violent and /or criminal in nature. Gang involvement is appealing to adolescents seeking a substitute family, protection in their neighborhood; a forced sense of respect from others; an outlet to vent behaviors that aren't tolerated in the general community; drugs; power and in many instances income earned through illegal activity .

Preventive Services Caseworkers are encouraged to assess each family individually considering all of the contributing factors to the presenting problems of the case. Staff have participated in gang awareness training and are actively using available resources to help in identifying the influence of gang activity in the youth population that they serve. Staff consistently strive to engage youth and their parents in more positive methods of interacting with the community as a component of the plan to address the presenting negative behaviors and problems that were present when the family first sought intervention.

Youth who present themselves (or can be readily identified) as members of a gang in cases receiving Preventive Services present several challenges that may impede the effectiveness of service provision .

Thorough and accurate assessment of the influencing factors can be essential in providing effective intervention for youth and their families. It is difficult to accurately assess the extent to which a teen is participating in gang activity and the level of severity of his individual behaviors as a result. Although studies indicate that the risk for involvement in dangerous

and criminal activities is increased for youth who are gang members – it isn't a crime to be a gang member. A more comprehensive view of the individual youth and the family and various factors in the community are needed to more accurately define the problems they are facing and effect change.

What are the causes for an individual teen to seek or be sought by the gang influence? Can alternate interventions remediate some of these issues?

What is the extent of the influence of teen's gang involvement on the presenting and ongoing issues that provide the basis for intervention?

Can the parent or caretakers effectively identify and engage the youth in more positive alliances to substitute the teen's perceived need to participate in gang membership?

How can we as service providers prioritize the introduction of interventions for teens and their families to be more effective in influencing positive changes?

These are some of the issues that are considered in the process of establishing a viable service plan for gang involved teens and their families. We continue to endeavor to meet the challenges posed by these difficult questions in assessing the needs of our families.

Jeanne Garcia
DSS Assistant Director



LONG ISLAND ADVOCACY CENTER TO MAKE GANGS UNWELCOME: LET'S WELCOME ALL STUDENTS

School is where children spend most of their time and where they learn to feel either good or bad about themselves. Many of the schools where there is gang activity lack a feeling of welcoming and acceptance equally for all students. If a school does not evoke a feeling of welcoming to students of all ethnicities and learning abilities, it is certain to have some of its students gravitate towards gang activity.

If a student is not meeting with academic success, and/or does not have a healthy interest or full engagement in other activities outside of school, they are more likely to be attracted to a gang.

The reason for this situation is all due to negative commonalities. Young people who are bored with and hate school, have nothing positive to look forward to, nothing that gives them a sense of belonging, nothing that gives them a sense of their future or pride in themselves, except for the friendships of other gang members who share the same negative feelings.

Punishment doesn't solve the problem. You can't punish someone who has nothing to lose. The prospect of jail is nothing to be afraid of. Jails are filled with people who have experienced the same negative issues in school. Where there is nothing to look forward to and life continues to be viewed in the same light, day in and day out, with no hope for change, the gang life offers an attraction unlike what is otherwise available.

To most gang members, being sent away to a reform school or jail is better than being in school. According to research, evaluations reveal that 80% to 90% of the incarcerated population present with various learning, emotional and mental disabilities, such as ADHD, ODD, ADD, Dyslexia, Mental illness, borderline and mental retardation.

The same problems can be seen among youth who participate in gangs. Studies also show that 8 out of 10 gang members have undiagnosed learning disabilities.

[Research from Whitted Cleary and Takiff, Publications on Prevalence of Children with Disabilities in the Juvenile Delinquent/Corrections Population. Summary of Research articles.]

With a combination of being unwelcomed and potentially having disabilities, these students may be doomed to failure.

When it comes to a solution to the problem, leaving the gang should not be the sole focus. Leaving a gang is not the hard part. The real challenge is finding and developing a healthy interest in something that will create the possibility of interacting with positive role models and peer groups, who welcome and accept the individual. It is in finding something which the student will be successful at and develop a sense of pride, self-esteem and empowerment, that will turn the child away from gangs.

All adults who have control in helping develop the student's future should be collaborating and sharing resources and ideas to help develop a positive plan of action. They must connect to the community at large and all its resources, which can provide experiences essential to the child's development. When people connect, you extend your reach and create advocacy, increasing the chances of positive versus negative experience for the child.

When schools are creating programs both during and after school, those programs should be multicultural and community based in nature. Positive programs to support belonging and engagement could include: sports, arts clubs, social clubs, church youth groups, and cultural activities. These programs can help develop students' self esteem, empowerment, as well as pride in who they are and where they

come from. These feelings are necessary in order to move students towards a more positive future. Programs that extend from the school into the community and programs that demonstrate to students' their own innate talents, are a great way to reach most at risk youth in our school and community.

We need to insist that schools make a concentrated effort, on a day-to-day basis, to identify these children at risk and do everything possible to evaluate, diagnose, and provide services to address their problems. Everyone needs to feel they are good at something and that they can make a meaningful contribution, no matter how different they are from society's perception of acceptability.

Schools have the ability to think outside the box and be creative in a cost-effective way.

In order to address the disparities that often exist for students of all ethnicities and learning disabilities, schools should be proactive by: providing timely evaluations and services for children who have school issues; creating positive, community based programs; and by making school a welcoming place for all children. There is a monumental gap in what schools are doing and what they could be doing to save a whole generation of at risk students.

Rosemarie C. Komorowski
Educational Advocate



FEATURED PROGRAM: PROBATION-GANG PREVENTION

Success is a relative term in the supervision of street gang members and gang member associates. The standard to gauge a probationer's compliance is skewed when considering the behavior and life circumstances of a gang member. The degree of dedication and activity the probationer has within the gang before he comes to us has a strong influence on the probability of success. With rare exception, a very active hard-core member of any street gang has very little interest in having a successful relationship with community supervision. Time and distance out of the gang lifestyle give us the greatest opportunity to work with a client and make progress.

The life circumstances of our clientele have some common threads. Most are 16-21 year old males that never finished High School, do not work or have any job skills, and engage in alcohol and substance abuse routinely. They have a propensity for recidivism, emotional immaturity, and poor impulse control. Most come from broken impoverished homes and either have a child or there is one on the way. Most have no steady means of transportation, few have

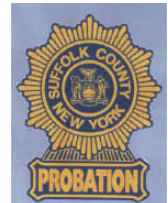
medical insurance, and some may have Medicaid. Most have a street reputation for violence and are notorious throughout the law enforcement community. Despite these negative factors I've witnessed probationers rise above their environment and life circumstances to make positive adjustments within their community. They do so in small increments that may not be apparent in the short term but carry weight over an extended period of time. Recidivism and substance abuse can divert the attention of the probation officer from the more compliant probationers.

In reviewing my caseload looking for an interesting success story I hadn't realized that I had four clients eligible for early discharge consideration from their probation sentence. Two MS-13 members, a Blood, and a Crip, each doing all that was asked of them. All had stable employment, with no evidence of a substance abuse or alcohol problem, and had not been rearrested while on probation. Their ties to the gang life gradually dissipated with positive achievement. However, one of these four was just recently arrested for a misdemeanor offense and his paperwork had to be pulled from court. A

careless mistake has cost him a discharge consideration. Relatively speaking, he still can be considered a success when measuring where he came from to the person he has now become.

A former client recently surprised me while I was making a home visit to another probationer's house. The last time I saw this client was in the courtroom where I recommended that he be resentenced to jail time. Then he was a hard-core member of the Bloods, dedicated to being a menace to society. My concern as he approached was levied by his unexpected smile. He wanted to tell me that he had dropped the gang life, was working six days a week at a local factory, and stopped smoking marijuana. He had a valid drivers license, his own car, and an apartment. Since his release from jail, no further trouble with the law. I asked him what took him so long? To wit he simply replied, "That ain't me no more." The tools for success lay torpid until he became motivated for change.

Matthew Porter
Probation Officer



AFY PEER SPECIALIST CORNER

Gang membership has been increasingly spanning across cultural and socio-economic boundaries. More and more middle class youth are becoming involved in gangs, and gangs which had been racially exclusive are now becoming racially diverse. From playgrounds to schools and parking lots, gang members are recruiting whichever youth will join them. The primary reasons that youth join gangs are because of the sense of family the gangs give them which is lacking in their own homes, a sense of protection if faced with an altercation, monetary gain, and perhaps most importantly, a sense of belonging.

As Peer Specialists we can discourage youth from joining gangs by helping these youth find a sense of identity and belonging. We can help these youth accept and be proud of their individual differences. A Peer Specialist can serve as a positive sense of protection for the youth, knowing that they have someone to rely on and can help them make positive decisions, as well as avoid dangerous situations. Helping youth to engage in positive extra-curricular activities is also a job that can be taken on by the Peer Specialists and can prove to be very effective in combating gang membership in our youth.

Kerri Kosloff, EAC AFY Peer Specialist

P A R E N T R E S O U R C E M A N A G E R I M P A C T I N G Y O U T H G A N G I N V O L V E M E N T T H R O U G H P A R E N T T R A I N I N G

Gangs have become a community issue in Suffolk County. The Latino community is just one of the ethnic groups greatly impacted by gangs. The Latin Kings, Norteños, Nuestra Familia, Mexican Mafia and Mara Salvatrucha, also known as MS-13, are examples of gangs that have infiltrated in the community. In its most common usage, the word gang is defined as a group of individuals that share a common identity. They often express this superficially by a particular color, symbol, and or sign. Gangs today are very diverse; their ideologies and beliefs motivate and influence their recruitment and efforts.

As the Parent Resource Manager for the AFY Program, all the cases I have encountered with gang involvement have demonstrated the negative aspects of gangs. Some of our clients state that their gang involvement is a form of identity and a family bond not found at home. When asked about the positive aspects of their gang,

they fail to make a convincing argument. Unfortunately, gang violence is not a rare occurrence in Latin Communities throughout the country. Due to the rivalry between the different gangs and their prominent presence in the school systems, children are exposed to them at a very early age. Some view it as normality within their communities.

Gangs are more predominant in areas where there are few social supports, especially if a particular population is neglected by the community. Gangs provide young members with a sense of belonging and, above all, protection from other gangs. Gangs lure children with a false picture of obtaining wealth. This is done by stealing or any illegal means of earning a living. Therefore, what can we do? One strategy is to spread knowledge not only to the children in these communities, but the parents. Parents are a key and an important component to combat our youth's membership in gangs. Parents need to be informed

of the risks their children are exposed to and to acknowledge that they might lack the parenting skills to parent their child. This may include skills in proper supervision, family time, communication, and staying in touch with their child. This is the focus of the parenting workshops en español for the Latino community. Additionally, integrating the youth into the resources that already exist in the community, however limited, is a strategic way of keeping children occupied and off the streets.

Carmen Villavicencio
Parent Resource Manager



V O I C E O F T H E C A S E M A N A G E R W O R K I N G W I T H T H E G A N G R E L A T E D P O P U L A T I O N

Working with gang involved youth has been particularly difficult. The gang involved youth that I have worked with seem less open to possible changes in their life that can help them. They instead, prefer to stay with their makeshift "family" of gang members.

The very first step to making any kind of change is getting them to at least sit down with you. The best way to do this is to just listen and not place any kind of judgment on what the youth are involved in.

By just listening to what they have to say and finding out the "why" of what lead

them to join a gang in the first place helps give the case manager direction in how to best help the youth.

The case manager can then begin to replace the feeling of support the youth gets from a gang with positive supports. This can be done by helping the youth and parent connect better and improve their relationship, increase their self-worth by helping them do better in school, giving them healthy recreational activities and linking them to a mentor or role model. In addition, they are often using/abusing some kind of substance, whether it be alcohol and/or marijuana.

Engagement is always the key to any success and it is especially important in order to help gang involved youth.

Caren Gomes
Case Manager



A F Y N E W S A N D N O T E S

PARENT TRAINING INSITUTE:

AFY has formed a partnership with EAC's Parent Training Institute.

AFY will be conducting training for parents of children with Attention Decifit-Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Opoisitional Defiant Disorder (ODD) on **July 12th, 2007 from 6-8pm** at the Ronkonkoma site.

In addition, AFY will be conducting training for parents of children with depression and Bipolar Disorder on **August 16th, 2007 from 6-8 pm** at the Ronkonkoma site.

CONGRATULATIONS ARE IN ORDER

The collaborative effort of the Alternatives For Youth program between Suffolk county agencies has been nationally recognized. The collaborating agencies in the AFY program are winners of the National Association of Counties (NACo) 2007 achievement award. Suffolk County DSS will be traveling to Virginia to accept the award on behalf of all the agencies.

MEETING THE NEEDS OF AFY FAMILIES


The AFY Peer Specialist program is adapting to work with the families past the initial 30 days for those families where the youth can benefit from an ongoing mentor.

MEETING THE NEEDS OF SPANISH SPEAKING FAMILIES


AFY is in the process of hiring another Full-time bilingual case manager to meet the growing needs of the Spanish Speaking community.

**THESE TRAININGS ARE OPEN TO THE ENTIRE PUBLIC, NOT JUST AFY CLIENTS,
CALL 631-648-2700 NOW TO SCHEDULE YOURSELF FOR TRAINING.**

EAC INC Alternatives For Youth Center	August 2007						
	Sun	Mon	Tu	Wed	Thu	Fri	S
3555 Veterans Hwy Suite R Ronkonkoma, NY 11779 Phone: 631-648-2700 E-mail: rwolf@eacinc.org DIRECTIONS TO AFY: EXIT 57 SOUTH on LIE. Take service rd. to 454 East (Veteran's Memorial Hwy) Continue on 454 East. 3555 will be on the west bound side of 454. At intersection of Locust Ave. Make a u-turn. 3555 will be on your right. To register your teen for the AFY Drop-in Program on 7/18, please contact: Carmen Villavicencio, Parent Resource Manager at 631-648-2700 x212			1		2		3 4
	5	6 6 pm AFY Parent Work- shop "Your Adolescent"	7	8	9	10	1 1
	12	13 12pm AFY Parent Workshop "Communicating with your Adolescent"	14	15	16 6-8pm Parent Workshop Series "Depression and Adolescence"	17	18
	19	20 10am AFY Parent Work- shop (en español) Grupo de Apoyo e Infprmativo Para Padres	21	22 7-9pm AFY Drop-In Program "Job Interview Skills" RSVP by 8/15	23	24	25
	26	27	28	29 2pm AFY Parent Work- shop "Discipline vs. Punishment"	30 6-8pm Parent Workshop Series "Parenting Partners: Parenting as a Team Though Separation"	31	1 2




ALTERNATIVES FOR YOUTH TEEN DROP-IN PROGRAM



Topic: "Job Interview Skills"
**Activities: Discussion
and role playing interviews**
Food and Refreshments Served

**Wednesday: August 22nd, 2007
7-9pm**



Education & Assistance Corp.
3555 Veterans Memorial Highway, Suite R
**Ronkonkoma, NY 11779 For more information and
to register call**
Carmen Villavicencio at 631-648-2700 x212

