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Safe Voluntary Exit Plans for Gang Involved Youth

Safe Voluntary Exit Plans for Gang Involved Youth in Rhode  
Island: A Qualitative Study

Patricia Foley

Providence College

A project based upon an independent investigation,  
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Social Work.

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## Abstract

This study was conducted with the intent of understanding safe exit plans for gang involved youth. There is limited literature around the existence of exit planning in the State of Rhode Island. Three interviews were conducted with four local stakeholders in the Rhode Island community. These interviews revealed that at risk youth can be safely guided out of gang life with the proper support systems and access to new life experiences. Social work practice, policy and research implications were addressed.

## Safe Voluntary Exit Plans for Gang Involved Youth in Rhode Island; A Qualitative Study

Gang violence is a prominent issue that affects the lives of many youth in the United States. Members enter gangs for many different reasons, including but not limited to protection, drug access and a sense of belonging. All too often members join a gang during a crisis period in their life, and are henceforth marked as a member in the gang; for many, leaving is not a practical or safe option. In 2008, the U.S Department of Justice estimated that approximately 800,000 people considered themselves gang members, with over 30,000 gangs in the United States (Crawford, 2009). With high statistical evidence of gang involvement, follows a significant number of gang related violence and drug use. Crisis prevention methods are needed to decrease the number of violent outbursts in heavily gang-populated areas. Non-violence trained street workers and police departments often work together to create order and ease tensions between rival gangs. One recent method includes state gang injunction; when using this method, a particular state would prohibit members of named gang members from interaction with one another, outlaw wearing specific gang related symbols or clothing, and monitor gang like activities. Beyond crisis intervention methods, methods of exiting a gang are also being studied, such as legal protection via registering as a gang member in specific counties. Due to the complications of exiting a gang, youth feel pressured to remain affiliated with the crew, even if their involvement is limited. Due to the rise in gang violence in California, the city of Los Angeles is currently proposing governmental material for a legal exit processes for gang members, which would help to protect members once they have removed their affiliation from a gang. There is much controversy over this process, as gang members may not feel comfortable registering with the legal enforcement in their city. There are currently limitations on the exit process which are still being questioned, revised, and implemented.

In today's society, crisis intervention for gang violence is extremely important in the field of social work. Youth in both rural and urban areas are often faced with the pressures of joining gangs. Safe ways of discussing gang involvement should be studied by social work practitioners so as to not to undermine the complexity of safely exiting a gang. Social workers practicing within the judicial system must also have knowledge regarding the culture and pressures of gang life so as not to endanger a client within the walls of the prison as rival gang members may also be incarcerated. It should be recognized that gang involvement does not end with youth. Although there are greater numbers of youth involved in the joining of gangs, adult members are also heavily involved in gang activity. A major complication that occurs with persons incarcerated for gang related crimes is the revolving door effect, where gang members continuously enter and re-enter correctional facilities due to additional legal infringements. After serving an amount of time in jail, members often return to the gang life when they are released. As clients experience recidivism, where a client is charged for a second, or multiple violations and must return to jail, cases become more complex for social workers.

Social work professionals play an important role in working with these clients on methods of ending involvement in gang activity. With this, proper precautions must be taken; otherwise a client may not exit the gang properly and could be violently attacked for deserting gang responsibilities. Social workers should be prepared to work with several different institutions to promote a safe exit plan for a gang member hoping to leave his prospective neighborhood or national gang. Furthermore, the type of gang must be considered, as several different categories of gangs exist. When planning an intervention, different methods of approaching varying gang structures should be researched. In one research on policy and intervention, McGloin (2005) writes about "a typology of different gang structures; 1)

traditional, (2) nontraditional, (3) compressed, (4) collective, and (5) specialty” (p.610).

McGloin (2005) explains that such gang types vary in terms of time of existence, size, and presence of subgroups affiliated with an umbrella gang. As these gangs operate differently, the professional working directly with the gang must comprehend the typology of the gang prior to successfully intervening (McGloin, 2005).

Professional social workers may encounter a client with a family member or close friend who is in a gang, seeking advice on how to proceed with a method of exit. Therefore, as family safety may also be compromised as a member cuts off ties with a gang affiliation, social workers should also be prepared to work with parents, siblings and extended family members of gang members. With proper training, practice, and knowledge, social workers may play an essential role in decreasing gang re-entry and gang violence in the United States.

Youth who become involved in gangs often do not realize the long-term implications of their choices. Being associated as a high profile gang member will likely surround that member with increased prospects of participating in high profile criminal activity. It is not uncommon for gang members to be incarcerated multiple times in their life due to the consistent criminal activity associated with being an active member of a gang. This study qualitatively explores safe exit plans for gang-involved youth, in Rhode Island, through interviews and a review of the most recent literature.

## **Review of Literature**

### **History of Gangs in the United States**

The prevalence of gangs in the United States is a deep-rooted phenomenon in our history. Gang violence occurs multiple times a day, in various forms of action. Due to the informal and exclusive nature of gangs, it can be difficult to pinpoint exactly when gangs began to form.

Research regarding gangs in Middle America suggests that gang-like activity has been occurring as early as the ancient Egyptians, when bands of robbers would attack traveling merchants along caravan routes (Allender, 2001). Early Chinese history also points to gang activity where illegal deeds for profit such as robberies and kidnappings took place. Allender (2001) suggests that gang idealization has occurred throughout history even in folklore, as it glamorizes pirates at sea whom made their living traveling to exotic lands and gaining fortune by engaging in violent acts such as murder, looting, and kidnapping. The first documented and well-identified gang in the United States was established in 1820, in New York City (Allender, 2001). This gang named itself the Forty Thieves and worked along the waterfront and ports in New York City. Formed by recent Irish immigrants, members of this gang were involved in acts of murder, robbery, and assault. Shortly after its formation, the Kerryonians formed in the same location, and was the rival gang to the Forty Thieves (Allender, 2001, p. 2). Though gangs have existed for this long, the question of gang culture is often debated. Do current gangs in today's society conduct themselves in the same manner that these 1820, American gangs did? While today's adult population tends to send a disapproving message about the existence of gangs in society, this was not always the case. Adamson's (2000) comparative research suggests that some early gangs were sponsored by political figures, and could lead to a future career. Adamson (2000) writes "gangs allied themselves with social and political clubs and often took direction from political bosses, who depended on them to mobilize the vote and protect polling places on election days; membership in a youth gang could lead to a career in local politics" (p. 275). In current gang culture, there is not as much discussion surrounding career development as a reason for joining a gang unit. On the contrary, most gang-involved youth are prepared for a life surrounding jail, hospitalization, and death. White gangs at this time "enjoyed a measure of

support from the adult population” (Adamson, 2000, p. 274). Gaining the approval of adult

members of society was one tactic that gangs circa the 1960’s and 1970’s:

Politically powerful adults did not approve of many of the things that white gangs did, such as breaking windows, reporting false fire alarms, cutting cable lines, defacing street signs, disturbing the peace at night, insulting people on the sidewalk, pilfering from stores, breaking into private dwellings, and looting factory yards and construction sites. Nevertheless those adults sponsored white street gangs, and rewarded them for playing a key role in neighbourhood defense, especially since urban government and police forces were weak, ineffective, and often corrupt. While adults frowned on activities which undermined the quality of community life, they approved of the youth gang’s role in keeping strangers, especially blacks, off their streets and beaches and out of their parks, baseball diamonds, swimming pools, saloons and dance halls (Adamson, 2000, p. 278).

As time has progressed, today’s society of gang culture continues to model much of the historical structure of early gangs. Criminal activity and goals of power attainment remain active ingredients in the formation of gangs. As racial identity remained important to social standing throughout history, this element of gang life did not decrease in significance to the formation of gangs. Race and ethnicity remains an important role in the creation of new gangs, and is often a main reason for rivalry to emerge between two strong gangs.

### **Ethnic and Cultural Gang Trends**

Often times, gangs are created within ethnic groups to create a sense of protection from other local ethnic groups. When working with or around gangs, it is critical to understand that though social media tends to portray gang members as urban African American males, historically black gangs did not form substantially until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, as opposed to white gangs which had been in existence for approximately 100 years at that time. “Black youth gangs did not exist as a recognized social problem until the great migration of the 1910s when large numbers of African Americans came to the northern cities” (Adamson, 2000, p.273). With a second wave of immigration in the mid-twentieth century, African American youth began to be



perceived as a threat to social order by politicians, police officials, and even social workers due to the creation of urban ghettos and the prominence of gang culture (Adamson, 2000).

Understanding the development of racial tension between black and white gangs in the past is relevant to how gangs form today. Though it is more common to see gangs with multiple ethnicities involved, the themes of protecting local territory, as well as a commitment to ethnicity still exists. Today's gang culture mirrors two infamous gangs that formed in the 1980's and are still banded together, the Crips and the Bloods. Gangs across the United States have identified themselves with these two father gangs, through aligning themselves with the use of color, as well as similar missions around gaining money, power and respect. Allender (2001) writes about the formation of the Crips and the Bloods, as well as two additional prominent gangs at that time:

In the 1980s, West Coast black gangs formed two loose confederations--the largest, the Crips, and their rivals, the Bloods. Contrary to what many believe, there is neither one Crip nor one Blood gang. Rather, numerous sets of each have joined together to either protect themselves or facilitate their criminal activities. These represent two of the Four Nations. The other two originate from Chicago. In the late 1970s, a very large criminal street gang, known as the Gangster Disciples, formed a coalition with several other street gangs to maximize drug profits and protect their members from violence perpetrated by rivals. The consolidation called itself the Folk Nation. Other gang sets in Chicago felt the need to form an alliance to ensure their share of the drug market. Led by the Vice Lords and the El Rukins, this band dubbed themselves the People Nation, thus creating the big four street gang nations, in no particular order of influence, the Crips, Bloods, Folks, and People (p. 6).

The importance of rival gangs to the structure of a gang should be considered. It seems that once a gang is formed, there is an immediate threat to other local gangs. The Forty Thieves rivaled the Kerryionians, the Crips rival the Bloods, and the Folks rival the People. It is interesting that this pattern of rivalry gang has continued into today's gang culture. Knowing the violence associated with being in a gang, and the high-risk activity conducted in these formal and exclusive groups of people, society often wonders what the advantages to being associated with a gang are. In other words, why is it that youth join gangs, and often remain in the gang while the

threats of assault, addiction, hospitalization, incarceration, and death loom around them?

Allender (2001) writes, “not all street gangs exist to sell drugs or commit criminal acts. Instead, young people normally seek gang involvement for some combination of the following five reasons...structure, nurturing, sense of belonging, economic opportunity, and excitement” (p. 4). In terms of structure, gangs offer the youth a code of conduct to live by (Allender, 2001, p. 4). Coming from disenfranchised homes, gang members often seek the structure that is lacking in other areas of their lives. Similarly, gangs offer a sense of nurture. “Gang members frequently talk of how they love one another. This remains true even among the most hardened street gangs” (Allender, 2001, p. 4). Theories such as the above demonstrate reasons around why gang members attempt to create their own support systems, outside of the traditional family structure. Similar to the sense of nurture, gang affiliation offers a sense of belonging. By being in a gang, one is publicly announcing through words, tattooing, graffiti, clothing, and activity, that this is the group of people that this person belongs to; a group of people that one would die for, and more importantly, a group of people who will offer a system of physical, financial and emotional protection. A more concrete reason for a person to commit to joining a gang is the promise, or hope, of greater economic opportunity. Gang members often support one another financially by posting bail if a member is arrested and providing street protection when becoming involved in drug trafficking, and other prosperous illegal activity. Additionally, youth members join gangs to increase stimulation and excitement in their daily routine. Excitement “often represents a motivation for suburban and affluent youths. Gangs composed of these types of individuals usually have very fluid membership, with associates joining and leaving to be replaced by others with a passing interest” (Allender, 2001, p. 4). The five reasons that Allender (2001) cites for joining a gang are simply the basics of why one might join a gang. Along with considering the

benefits of being in a gang, one should consider the implications of not being in a gang when living in an area with a high crime rate, and high poverty rate. Gang members often begin to recruit members at a very young age to ensure loyalty to the gang, avoiding this recruitment, or denying an invitation into a gang could deem very dangerous for a person in this environment. Furthermore, though the media often portrays gang members as eager to commit crimes, Allender (2001) writes “few young people that enter into the gang subculture do so for evil or criminal reasons. They are looking for something that they feel is lacking in their lives” (p. 4).

Just as social media tends to portray only the violent aspect of gang life, Allender (2001) writes that social media lacks to represent female members of gangs, as well as the white population in urban gang units. Allender (2001) suggests that there is an over representation of young black and Hispanic male members, exclusively involved in violence and drug trade; however he also suggests that this is not always the case. Allender (2001) writes “in reality, not all street gangs are involved heavily in drug trafficking; very few street gang members are prosperous; and no shortage of white male gang members exists in inner-city, suburban, or rural areas” (p.4). Allender (2001) continues to state that, females join gangs for the similar reasons as males, for protection and access to drugs. Though gangs are often misrepresented on television and in theaters, one might wonder why gangs are often portrayed revolving around one specific minority, or ethnic culture. Culture does play a vital role in the gang formation, especially in areas of the United States where the minimal available recourses, such as jobs and living areas, are being fought over. In a study of street gangs in Chicago, circa 1927, a common expressed feeling was disenfranchisement by society. As immigrant populations enter the United States, many face difficulty adjusting to the new culture, and feel disempowerment. Modern gangs face similar tribulations, based on race, ethnicity, and underrepresented political voice (Allender,

2001, p. 4). Allender (2001) cites one example of an ethnic gang evolving due to societal disempowerment and discrimination when Hispanic gangs began to form after the Zoot Suit Riots of 1943 (p.4). This riot, taking place in California, occurred when Caucasian military personnel, whom were not on duty at the time, physically attacked Hispanic males “who they felt were benefiting from the war while evading the dangers of combat. The physical danger from the rioters, coupled with other acts of prejudice and discrimination, caused the Latino community to band together more tightly” (Allender, 2001, p. 4). This is a common theme through the history of gangs. Some gangs become ethnically exclusive, only allowing members of their own to join, whereas some gangs unite over more universal challenges, such as political views, religious views, and protection on territories. Allender (2001) suggests “other ethnic groups, including Asians, Italians, Jews, Jamaicans, and many others, formed gangs because they too had to deal with prejudice and discrimination, which alienated them from mainstream society” (p. 4). The element of race serving as a reason for gang creation has not disappeared in today’s society, despite a more politically correct and cohesive and accepting community. Today, gangs appear to be more lenient in terms of allowing for diversity within the gang unit; however, many gangs still form around culture due to a common language being used for communicative purposes, or common areas of residence.

### **Adolescent Development**

When researching gang involvement, one will typically note a theme of adolescent involvement. Though there are gangs in existence with an older age range of involvement, for the most part, members enter a gang in their adolescent years and continue participation into their young adult life. As creation of one’s identity is extremely important in the social development of adolescents, one can see how the choice to be a part of a gang plays a significant

role in one's individuality. In one study regarding adolescent development in the context of education, Willems & Bosma (2006) suggest that an individual's sense of identity is formed through one's commitments in significant psychological domains. The researchers suggest that commitments portray character, and provide an individual with a sense of identity during a period of crisis, and even in a more self-chosen period of exploration (Willems & Bosma, 2006). Erik Erickson identifies four statuses on the basis of exploration and commitment in adolescent development; "identity achievement (commitments achieved after a period of exploration), moratorium (exploration in progress, commitments present). foreclosure (strong commitments, no exploration period), and identity diffusion (exploration presenter absent, no commitments) (Willems & Bosma, 2006, p.86). Grotevant, a researcher on adolescent identity development, as cited in Willems & Bosma, 2006, p. 87) "identified different contexts that play an important role in identity development: the culture and the community, the family, peers, professional and social environments" (Willems & Bosma, p. 87).

As adolescents are faced with social pressure to join a neighborhood gang, it is important for social workers to understand developmentally why this gang may hold great value in their lives. Social workers and professional involved in gang exit strategies must be aware that adolescence is "an age period of intense ideological hunger, a striving meaning and purpose, and desire for relationships and connectedness" (Erikson, 1968, as cited in King & Boyatzis, 2004, p.2). Strong peer relationships and social favor is important to the identity development of a youth. Some researchers believe that religion, as used in the development of an adolescent may reduce gang like activity. King & Boyatzis (2004) state "in adolescence, many youth turn toward religion and great civic involvement, and yet many others who turn away from religion join either gangs or hate groups, or become anti-social in their ways" ( p. 2). The research also found

that “adolescents high in religiosity in both 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade were higher in civic

engagement and lower in alcohol and marijuana use, whereas youth low in religiosity in other grades were lower in civic engagement and higher in risk taking” (King & Boyatzis, 2004, p.5).

Spirituality, as a function of adolescent development may sway adolescents from partaking in criminal activities associated with gang life. As one enters adolescence, society encourages youth to create an identity for themselves; “adolescents, in growing up, are repeatedly confronted with situations in which they have to commit themselves or have to reconsider their commitments in the light of changes (Coleman, 1974, as cited in Willems & Bosma, 2006, p. 87). They go through a multiphasic crisis of identity (Matteson, 1975, as cited in Willems & Bosma, 2006, p. 87).

### **Gangs In Rhode Island**

Specifically in Rhode Island, there are several local gangs (See Appendix A). A section on the online Providence Journal site, *The Gangs of Providence*, reports information regarding tag names, criminal involvement and demographics on several local gangs in Rhode Island.

Using their gang profile site, a descriptive table, named Table 1.0, was created so as to understand relevant themes and concepts in today’s high profile gangs. See Appendix A to review table. Rhode Island gang units generally have between one and three rivals. Due to the small size of the state, these gangs tend to interact frequently. The majority of gangs in Rhode Island are not exclusive to one race, with certain exceptions in MS-13, Laos Pride, Oriental Raskals and the Asian Outlaw Boyz, which are predominately made up of Asian and Latino members. Gang colors such as red and blue are predominantly chosen due to alliance with historical gangs such as the Crips and Bloods. Some gangs are noted for specific criminology, however the majority of the gangs listed partake in various forms of violence, such as assault,

drug trafficking, auto theft, and breaking and entering. The language used in graffiti tagging is also important to understand. Gangs often use numbers to represent the name of their gang. For example, The Providence Street Boyz uses the number 1064 to tag on buildings. This stands for the ten letters in “Providence”, the six letters in “Street” and the four letters in “Boyz”. The Providence Street Boyz gang is not the only gang to use this numerical symbolism. Most gangs use numbers to represent their gang when they graffiti territory in their neighborhoods. Gangs also use numbers to represent the placement of the first letter of each title in the alphabet. For example the Original Crip Gang tags 1537 because O is the fifteenth letter in the alphabet, C is the third, and G is the seventh.

Currently, an institute promoting non-violence in Rhode Island and public authorities are taking action modeling after promising CeaseFire initiatives taken in Chicago and Boston (Scrimshaw, 2007). “After the Chicago Ceasefire model was implemented in 2000, the second-most violent police beat in the city saw a 67 percent decrease in shootings. Replications of the program in six other parts of the city produced an average reduction in shootings of 45 percent. Chicago’s shootings dropped to the lowest level in 40 years in 2004” (Scrimshaw, 2007). Scrimshaw (2007) compares the disturbing number of gangs and violence to a health concern when she writes “this deadly cycle of shootings is a public health epidemic. By approaching it as such—as a contagious disease of underlying expectations and pressures, one that is both treatable and preventable—we can make significant progress towards halting it” (Scrimshaw, 2007).

An institute in Rhode Island specifically addresses gang violence through their building of relationships between street workers and current gang members. In 2006, these street workers and the aforementioned institute made over 8,000 visits to youth homes, working with high risk

youths to mediate conflict as well as get students back into school or working towards employment (Scrimshaw, 2007). Scrimshaw (2007) discusses how relationship building between street workers and current gang members is helpful to reducing gang activity:

Carefully selected for their intimate knowledge of what motivates an urban youth to shoot, then trained by violence prevention experts, these 'violence interrupters' get plugged into the street grapevine to understand who might be seeking revenge. When they identify a troubled youth on the verge of seeking vengeance, they work to draw him into thinking about the devastating consequence of retaliation for himself and his family. Many times, building that relationship is enough. If that fails, and the violence occurs, the workers head to the hospital to talk to the victims friends and try to squelch ideas of retaliation (Scrimshaw, 2007).

Through this one crisis intervention plan, individual relationships are built, and individual violent outbreaks are disturbed. This is an excellent tool, however additionally, systematic thought should be given to this area of need nationally. Multiple organizations must work together in order to not only intervene, but also prevent gang formulation. Allender (2001) discusses the SARA technique where agencies scan, analyze, respond and assess gang violence in certain areas. This process is repeated after the assessment of whether the response was effective (Allender, 2001, p. 8). Furthermore, Scrimshaw (2007) suggests a more community-involved approach to reducing gang violence in Providence and on a national scale:

These are the ingredients for success: Neighborhood and religious groups that can work with police, schools, and public- health and service experts to change the norms that feed violence. A trained network of former gang members who understand the underlying issues, keep a pulse on potential conflict, and step in quickly to negotiate. Strong financial support from federal and local government and from business leaders. A neutral organization such as a university to help draw together groups from across a city and state (Scrimshaw, 2007).

As incarcerated youth experience a revolving door effect due to gang affiliation, there is need for social workers and professionals interfacing with this population to explore safe exit plans for gang members. Professionals are ill equipped with means and information surrounding ways of supporting gang members with safe exit plans. With the mentality that once accepted into a gang,



there is no getting out; many members of gangs remain involved in gang activity after spending years of their life behind bars. Exiting a gang is a dangerous process for youth. Often times youth believe it to be too unsafe to leave a gang, for fear of being treated as a traitor or informant. Consequences for exiting a gang without permission of the gang include, but are not limited to, being gang jumped, shot and murdered, stabbed and murdered, and socially isolated.

It is difficult to helpfully guide gang members out of gang involvement and into safer lifestyles with limited community supports. In this study, qualitative research has been conducted to gain a better understanding of how professionals might be able to support gang involved youth in a manner which may help them to exit their perspective gangs. The researcher set out to learn if current exit plan approaches existed in Rhode Island, and what agencies or groups of professionals were working with these plans.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

This research study was an exploratory, qualitative study with a convenience sample of professionals within Rhode Island whom the researcher had interacted with through her college as well as through a previous internship at a juvenile correctional facility. Interviews with four professionals who work directly with gang affiliated youth in different roles and levels of work were interviewed for approximately one hour.

### **Sampling**

The researcher's sample consisted of a group of professionals in Rhode Island who work directly with gang affiliated youth. This researcher used a convenience snowball sample. There was no requirement of age, length of involvement in field of study, or education. The participants, however, were required to be professionals who currently work with this population. Participant 1 is a professor at a college in Rhode Island. Though his primary role is

as a professor, he also runs a program through the college, which engages local youth with gang affiliations and college students one night a week in a recreational setting. Furthermore, this professor is a board member at a small agency in Rhode Island, which promotes non-violence, and works directly with at risk adolescent populations. Participant 2 is a male director at a small agency, which works with probation officers and youth who are transitioning out of a correctional facility and back into the community. Participant 3 is a female caseworker at the same agency, which Participant 1 sits on the board for. Participant 3 is also coordinates extreme sports at the agency, which works with juveniles re-entering communities in Rhode Island. Participant 4 is a street worker at the same agency as Participant 3. He is stationed at a local school, where he provides support for at risk students considering joining a gang. Participant 4 also mediates between multiple gangs in Rhode Island. He acts a mentor with gang affiliated youth and works with their families to provide support.

### **Data Gathering**

Before conducting the interview, participants were asked to read an informed consent (See Appendix B). This document explained that information collected would remain confidential. Each participant was interviewed for approximately one hour (See Appendix C for format.). The same questions were asked with each participant, however, as conversation naturally occurred, the researcher and participants went deeper into some areas than others. All interviews were recorded and later transcribed by the researcher. The recordings were kept safely in a locked drawer until they were transcribed, and then destroyed (see attached interview questions, Appendix C).

### **Data Analysis**

After transcribing each recorded interview, the researcher analyzed the responses. The researcher specifically looked for themes around why members joined gangs, reasons for transitioning out of gangs, consequences of leaving gangs, and plans for safe removal. The researcher also studied themes of suggestions to create or improve safe exit plans. Finally the researcher took note of any suggestions raised of how the community can create a safe environment, which may prevent gang involvement.

### **Findings**

This qualitative study was conducted in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding around the process of safely exiting gangs in the New England Area. Four key stakeholders in gang violence were interviewed for approximately one hour around their professional practice, personal experience, and theoretical perspective on the existence of safe gang exit planning.

Three of the four interviewees have professional connections to the same organization, however, each of their professional roles and daily work greatly differ, and therefore offer diverse and compelling perspectives and experiences. Stakeholder 1 works full time, as a professor at a college in New England. Additionally he is a board member of an agency, which works to decrease the use of violence, as a means of power. This agency's client population is urban youth, heavily affiliated with gangs in that area. Stakeholder 2 works for an independent state run organization, which offers case management and probation work for youth transitioning out of a local juvenile corrections facility. Stakeholder 3 is a case manager at the same agency as Stakeholder 1. However, Stakeholder 3 works to aid juveniles in the re-entry to their communities. In addition to her re-entry work, she coordinates an extreme sports division at the agency, which introduces urban youth to sports such as snow boarding, surfing and skiing.

Stakeholder 2 and Stakeholder 3 were interviewed simultaneously. The researcher contacted Stakeholder 2 initially, and Stakeholder 2 then invited Stakeholder 3 to join the interview. As Stakeholder 2 and 3 work together on some of their cases, Stakeholder 2 thought it would be beneficial to hold the interview with both professionals at the same time. Stakeholder 4 is a male street worker at the same agency as Stakeholder 1 and Stakeholder 3. Stakeholder 4 works directly with the at risk population of youths who are either affiliated with gangs, or considering joining a gang.

In conducting these in depth interviews, seven major themes were found. These themes included: why do youth join gangs and what do they offer, the organizational structure of gangs in this particular community, the role of females in gang violence, reasons for exiting a gang, consequences of remaining affiliated with a gang as well as the consequence of exiting a gang, and the creation or existence of a blueprint in planning for exit strategies.

### **Why do youth join gangs and what do they offer?**

Having had the exposure of direct practice with gangs on a day to day basis, these stakeholders all had responses around what reasoning existed for joining gangs in a particular city. One theme that was found to be repetitious in the joining of gangs was the idea of security.

Stakeholder 1 stated:

The other thing is, a lot of young people get into gangs out of a desire for being more secure. And they have either been bullied or they feel threatened in some way or another, or more often what is the case is that someone close to them, somebody that they care about, has been bullied or hurt in front of them and they can't do anything about it. And it's a really, traumatic experience and if it is replicated, or you don't have other means of processing it, it makes perfect sense to try to hook up with other people that you feel can provide security for you.

Stakeholder 1 also continued to challenge the mainstream cultural perspective which “is to think that this is somebody who really went off track, or this is somebody that life was really unfair to and so they fell into this.” He views this differently in that “particularly young males, and increasingly young females, but young males, when they are making the decision about joining a gang... their doing a pretty realistic assessment of what their options are and this is the most meaningful choice that they can make.” In saying this Stakeholder 1 really points to a value perspective which does not blame the youth for joining a gang, but seeks understanding in that this is one way to have their basic needs met in the environment which they are living in.

Stakeholders 2 and 3 both continue with the thought process of joining a gang in order to have basic needs met. Stakeholder 2 stated “I mean these are kids who go to school and haven’t even eaten breakfast. They don’t even know the meaning of breakfast.” In understanding why a person finds joining a gang a desirable and appropriate choice, Stakeholder 2 points to the structure of the family, community and role of their school:

In terms of a younger population; you need to figure out the foundation with these kids. If you have a no connection to your family, or a low connection to school, if that exists it’s going to be very difficult for that kid to get out of the gang or to want to get out of the gang because he needs to meet those needs within the gangs. So relationships with the family is crucial. Identity; you know if it is a kid who lacks self-image, who doesn’t see himself as being an individual, he sees himself as part of a group...if a kid doesn’t have a good connection to his school. School is a connection to your community, so if you don’t follow a school or have that school spirit, or you don’t have that sense of community, then it’s going to be difficult.

In a similar theme Stakeholder 3 emphasized that fundamental needs are met through the gang life, which are not being met at home. In an act of survival, some youth turn to gang involvement, she stated:

No basic needs are being met. A lot of these kids, you look at them and there are some things missing. There are some real basic things that are missing. Even when that is a

parent who isn't doing something that they should be doing, or a parent that is just supportive and loving. That can be part of the problem. Another part of the problem can be eating Ramon noodles for the 2000<sup>th</sup> time, because that is all you have. You know, wearing you brothers hand me down's while now you are ashamed too. So now you don't fit in with everybody because they are a little high watery. And you know, there is a reason to join a gang! Because these kids are saying *you belong*, where those kids are saying *you're weird. You don't fit in because you have those weird clothes.*

In a response to Stakeholder 3, Stakeholder 2 agreed “that’s the selling point. That right there. So if the gang says *we will get you fat. We will get you nice clothes.* That’s a level of status. Once a kid hears that, he’s hooked.” Three of the four interviewees specifically pointed to a need for protection, adolescent’s home life, and lack of basic needs being met for a solid reason why a person might find entering a gang a desirable cause.

### **Organizational Structure of Gangs**

A very interesting finding in this interview process was a look into the typology of gangs in one particular city in New England. Where social media tends to portray high levels of organization within gangs, this seemed to be a rare finding, though in existence, in the Stakeholder’s responses. In describing the difficulty in creating a plan around systematically breaking down gangs and rebuilding the community, Stakeholder 3 responded that in Providence “we don’t have a lot of organized gangs. Our crews are sporadic, intense, electric, and energetic, and they don’t follow the sets of rules.” By not following one set of rules, it can be very difficult to create one model of eliminating violent gang culture in our society. The street worker, or Stakeholder 4 reflected on the difficulty in working with unorganized crews:

They say in [this city] there are over 30 gangs. And I would say that in some of the crews that we deal with, I don’t technically put some of these crews in a gang category. I mean, the police do, and they categorize them for different reasons than we do. But there are a lot of kids that we know that, you hang with a certain crew of people and you give yourselves a name. *Like okay, there are 8 of us, now; lets give ourselves a cool name.* But

once they get into a fight, or start getting into any criminal activity, that's when the cops start pointing and saying, you know what, you guys are a gang now. But there is no structure though...But with a lot of these unorganized crews, there is no stopping them, unless we get them all together. Or pull a certain [kid]; find the strong kids, who are more influential, we pull those kids out. So those types of kids, those types of crews, those gangs there, it's easier to pull kids out.

However, though rare, organized gangs do still exist in this New England city. Stakeholder 2 discussed his knowledge of more organized gangs in his city, which has since become less active over the years as the city "gang unit, and with the federal laws, they have really begun to hammer down." So now, as opposed to structured gangs, this city is run mostly by "what we call community gangs; where kids grow up from certain neighborhoods, there is really no hierarchy; there is just a crew" (Stakeholder 2). In terms of structure, organized gangs "where there is a hierarchy, codes of ethics...follow the code from the Godfather" (Stakeholder 2). In this particular city, the Asian Community Gangs are highly recognized for their organization and hierarchical structure. These gangs use an order, which involves a leader, commonly referred to as the O.G., which means "Original Gangster. It's like a senior gang member. And typically that person has committed some serious charges where he is respected among his peers" (Stakeholder 3).

Along with this theme, Stakeholder 4 responded in a separate interview that "the gangs that are around here... that are more structured and organized, are the Asian gangs. They have an OG, they have lieutenants, they have people they need to answer to from the soldier and all the way up." Stakeholder 3 contributes this organization of the Asian gangs behalf on the history that "Asian gangs, a lot of them migrate from the West. So they were integrated from the whole Crip/Bloods culture from the West, and that kind of just came down this way." It is important to

remember that for the most part, these stakeholders view the gangs that they work with mostly as neighborhood crews, with less organization and structure than some gangs are portrayed to have.

### **Female Role in Gang Violence**

One theme that was not significantly researched prior to conducting interviews, was the role of females in gang life. When interviewing, it was mentioned numerous times that young females tend to be a cause for gang violence to heat up in any given moment.

Stakeholder 2 told a story from experience about how two rival crews became violent when “one girl got in between two guys,” which caused “shootouts left and right.” Stakeholder 2 confirms that females today are playing a very important role in gang life:

I remember a lot of times, when I was younger; the girls would be the ones that would sneak the weapons into parties into clubs. Some of the things that we do know about females is that it is not very unlikely that a whole crew of males have had sexual relationships with them. I know of gangs where they are *sexing* girls into gangs.

Where Stakeholder 2 focused on some personal experience from the past, as well as relevant knowledge from today, Stakeholder 3 really focused on the aggressive behavior likely found when working with female gang members. Stakeholder 3 contributes social media to increasing the role of females in gang life. She stated:

“Yeah, they are on the rise. A lot of them are like, the whole *Jay Z, Beyoncé* thing. You know I still cannot stand that that song came out. A great song, but these girls are now like *ride or die*. The girls now have such shame and low self esteem, and the guys feed that, that they are like *I will do anything for my man. I have to prove to him that I am by his side. And if a girl looks at him wrong, I’m going to go over there and I am going to punch her in the face. And if she is from an opposing gang we are going to go off on each other and AIM bang and all of that, back and forth* and then its going to get his crew involved and his crew involved because I may have flirted with her man in math class or something and now there is a gang war. There is a war. You know, with forty deep on each side. And the girls are intense. They are dangerous. A lot of time, the girls are doing the AIM banging, and spreading it... These girls are really trying to prove themselves out



there too. Against each other. They are fighting hard against each other. They are going to these girls, with all their other girls and they are rumbling.

Stakeholder 4 also briefly mentioned “a lot of these kids... beef out... over petty things. *I don't like your clothes. I messed with your girl.*” This street worker responded that this type of a response begins a cycle “and then one fight leads to another and then it leads to guns and knives. And that's when it gets heavy, when somebody gets shot” (Stakeholder 4).

### **Reasons for Exiting a Gang**

According to Willems & Bosma (2006) adolescence is the prime time for someone at risk to join gangs. This then would lead us to believe that most adolescents will eventually age out of gangs. The original purpose of this research was to find out if safe exit plans exist in Rhode Island. In order to conceptualize exit planning, one must understand the reasoning behind why gang members choose to exit. Why are they making that choice to leave the gang life behind? Stakeholder 1 contributes this process to age. He (Stakeholder 1) responded:

They kind of age out around 24 years old. 23, 24, 25, and so part of it is keeping, helping them stay alive, and get started on a path so that when they are ready in their twenties, they have things to move on to... And what tends to happen around 24 or 25 is in terms of cognitive, emotional, physical development, they are at a different place.

This different place, according to Stakeholder 1 is that “often and unfortunately by that point they will have one or two kids out of wedlock. A lot of them really want to be good parents...” With the added pressures of parenthood, gang members often exit as they get older in order to provide a stable and safe environment for their children. Additionally, Stakeholder 1 later states that youth gang membership is appealing and exciting, “when you are young and you have got a ton of energy, a lot of testosterone flowing through your body it can be pretty fun. But it is exhausting and it can move into just being a source of real stress over time” (Stakeholder 1).

From his work, Stakeholder 1 responded that the men he works with eventually face a crossroads:

What they'll describe is having a kind of public face, street face, and a sense of themselves as a private person, and they can feel the tension between those growing. A big part of their reason for wanting to change is living that tension is just... and the person out on the street gets to feel more and more, I don't know, unreal and, something they don't want to be anymore. I don't know if it's a spiritual thing, or just a psychological thing but it really is this big question of 'okay, who am I going to be?' And feeling this kind of disconnect.

Due to the developmental process, these stakeholders are suggesting that as gang members' age, gang life becomes less necessary, and more of a burden. Stakeholder two responded:

See as we get older those things become less important to you. You start to think about your future; if I'm a parent, do I want my kid to live the same life style that I lived. And that's why you see the difference in attitude when the kid is aging into adult hood as opposed to a teenage still trying to figure out their self-worth and their purpose in society.

As these gang members age out of gangs, some of the consequences do not immediately disappear. There is a long process of healing, which was not directly discussed in these findings.

### **Consequences of Remaining Affiliated & Exiting a Gang**

A major mental health concern around gang members both active and inactive is the untreated PTSD which forms as a result of the consistent exposure to violent crimes. Key Stakeholder 1 made reference to the chief of police in his city. He explains the chiefs beliefs around PTSD, which he also shares "one of the things I have heard him say several times, and I agree with is 'A lot of these gang members have PTSD, only there is not P. It's just Traumatic Stress Syndrome. It's just not a very fun way to live after a certain age'" (Stakeholder 1).

Through case work, Stakeholder 3 has also encountered PTSD; in a separate interview from Stakeholder 1, she explains:

They also have a lot of PTSD, these kids. They have a lot of grief. Every kid that we have worked with knows somebody who has been killed. So they have a lot of grief that nobody has ever taught them how to deal with. They don't know how to talk about it. None of it. They get to wear their RIP hats and T shirts, and then a week later they are tucked away and nobody talks about it anymore. So they don't know what to do with that. They don't even know that they have those feelings.

Though PTSD is a serious mental health concern which gang members are not always able to cope with or manage, there are additional consequences to exiting gangs. Stakeholder 4 explained that when he is working with a gang member he often gets asked the question *“if I do choose non-violence, or I do choose to get out of the gang, what do I do then? Because I don't have the support of the gang anymore.”* (Stakeholder 4). This is a major concern of the gang member. Stakeholder 4 continues to express the voice of the gang member when he responds *“So if I'm walking down the street, I can't run to them and say, yo I just got shot at by so an so. Obviously I'm on my own”* (Stakeholder 4).

Stakeholders 1 and 4 really stress and discuss the consequence of exposure to and involvement in continuous violence if they join a gang. Stakeholder 4 highlights the consequence of joining a gang when he discusses the limited ways of exiting:

So there is a way out, but it depends on the gang and the leader, and what reason do you want to get out. Especially if you are in the gang, and you are involved, and you know a lot! *Cuz if we let you out there is a lot of information; there is a possible risk that you might give up some information.* So it depends on where you are at in a gang, and who the leader is, and your reasons for wanting to get out. So if you are trying to get out to do good, to better yourself, they might be easier on you. If you are trying to get out and join another gang, they are definitely not going to let you out.

In reference to a story about helping a youth exit a gang, Stakeholder 4 experienced a jump-out. When a client this street worker was consulting with, he was unable to convince the O.G. to lift the law on jump out, under the clause that his client was high when the gang initiated him, and

he was not fully aware of what his involvement would entail. When asked how to get out the

O.G responded “*Only way to get out, is we have to jump him out... Cuz if we don’t jump him out, we will just beat him up every time we see him*” (Stakeholder 4, in reference to a conversation he had with a gang member). Additionally, Stakeholder 1 explained that in the process of joining a gang, the member does so, often with the intention of having a crew of people to protect them.

The unintended consequence is:

What they don’t see is that means that not only do you have my back but that everybody that bothers you, I have to get your back. So if there are 50 of us that are in a gang I know have 50 backs that I have to watch instead of just my own. And the chances of my being perpetually involved in conflict with people who do not always have very good judgment is really high.

So all too often, in seeing protection these young gang members actually expose themselves to more danger. Tattooing can also create a long lasting consequence for youth affiliated gang members. Gang units often use tattooing to mark their affiliation with specific crews. This is becoming increasingly dangerous, as when their fellow members are not present at all times to protect a gang member if they are in the wrong place at the wrong time. Opposing gang units are easily able to identify the a different gang member by visible markings, and therefore act violently. Stakeholder 4 discussed this as it is happening in California:

My supervisor just came from California. And that’s where gangs originated from, so it’s very serious there, to the point where, if somebody asks you what gang you are in, there are two options. Either you tell them what gang you are in, which can potentially cause you to get killed, or if you don’t, they will strip you, because most people, who are in gangs in California, tattoo the gang somewhere on them. Either on their chest, or their back. So they were actually telling people to take off their shirt. So there are two options... There is a consequence by either not telling that gang who you are, they can either do something to you, but if you go back to your crew and they find out that you didn’t represent, they could do something to you.

The consequences for gang involvement are endless, but include losing friends and family members through violent gang related fighting, spending time in prison, involvement in high profile criminal activity, such as dealing drugs, and death at a young age.

### **Blueprint for Exiting a Gang**

When researching about the existence of gang units and the complications of exiting a gang, this study's purpose was to explore the existence of a theoretical model, or step by step approach that is implemented in the case planning around helping gang members exit gangs. The stakeholders all expressed a similar thought; there is no clear answer yet. Stakeholder 1 discussed the lack of organized process around this task, and for the most part, expressed the unfairness in hoping to help gang members exit gangs.

If you're going to, I think, telling somebody to get out of a gang, I mean I appreciate your dilemma, so I am sympathetic, but it's just not helpful. It's not a meaningful piece of advice because it would be sort of like me telling you, stop loving your parents. Or, I don't know if you are Catholic, but it would be, you would be much better off if you were not Catholic anymore. It might be true in your particular case, but it's sort of like, well what's the alternative? And I think the challenge is that somebody has to believe that there is a more meaningful alternative and then it's a process of transitioning out and transitioning in, and they overlap a lot. And there is not, in my observation, with individual youth, it's not a neat linear process. It's sort of two steps in this direction, a step back in this direction, a step sideways over here, another step forward. Some of that is just developmental, some of that is just very circumstantial, you know depending on the context that they are in, whether the people that are around them are supportive of what they are trying to do, or they are trying to undercut them. (Stakeholder 1).

Instead Stakeholder 1 believes professionals should be focusing on distributing knowledge, resources and skills, to provide for a meaningful and sustainable life. He responds that gang members need, for starters, "real simple things; they have got a GED, maybe they have a trade or a skill that they can sell, that's legitimate. Maybe they have some kind of connection to, a more mainstream support system of one kind or another, whatever that may mean." He believes that

“it’s just kind of little things that you can put into place that you can also look at and say this is going to be you know, four or five more years of, a struggle.” Stakeholder 3 has similar views around the supporting the gang member, accepting them for who they are and where they are, and providing resources which may help them open their perspective towards life outside of the gang. Stakeholder 3 responded:

The most that we can do here is expose them to new opportunities. And also expose them to experiences that they haven’t experienced before. To get them to get out of their same behaviors and their same things that they are attracted to; find new things that they can be attracted to. So we’re not going to tell the kid “you have to get out, you have to get out or else you are going to die or you will be arrested, because that is my fear inside as well, of course it is!”

In this topic area, expressions of support were given. Expressions of “that feeling of belonging” and “exposing them to new opportunities” and “and gaining a sense of belonging to this community that is like them, but not like them also. And they get that sense of attachment to other things and attraction to other things” (Stakeholder 3) were discussed.

Furthermore, and vitally important to these findings was the concept of stopping kids from joining gangs before it is too difficult to help them exit out. Stakeholder 2 responded in a manner which allows the researcher to see that community work must be increased in this area of the country;

I think that the focus has to be around keeping kids from joining gangs. I think that [Stakeholder 2] hit it earlier, with kids who are in gangs. What you want to do is, you want to show them opportunities, so that they can see their life without that gang. Ultimately the kid in the gang is going to have to figure that out, in how they are going to maneuver that. But you have to show them opportunities. You have to show them that you will be there for them when they make that leap and bound.

The overall consensus between all four stakeholders was one of building a relationship, and continuing to support the person involved with the gang through all aspects and measures of their

life. Stakeholder 4 really reiterated this point when he stated “I think, being optimistic, there is a way, we don’t have all the answers, and we just haven’t found it yet. But it all boils down to the relationship that you have with the kid, and what type of gang they are in.” It seems there is still much work to be done to create theories and plans which will allow gang members who are seeking to exit a gang safely, to do so with more support.

### **Summary and Implications**

This study was completed to gain a better understanding of gang culture in Rhode Island; as well as to explore means for gang involved youth to leave their gangs in a safe and controlled manner. Based on the qualitative analysis of the four stakeholders interviews, the data denies the existence of a model approach to helping gang members exit. Instead, the data has informed the researcher of a new perspective, which is to accept the gang involved youth “where they are” in their life process, provide means of support, and expose these members to new, exciting aspects of culture and society. In conducting the interviews, the researcher found a small, but devoted community of people who work on a daily basis to keep gang members safe in Rhode Island. These stakeholders discussed the need for each youth to live a meaningful life, whether their choice was to remain in the gang, or to exit the gang. Each stakeholder told a story of a different approach they take when working with gangs, however there was one theme which remained clear in all conversations; the use of relationship building. These invested workers explained that in order to reach a youth, they must first build a trusting relationship and later expose their client to new life experiences. The stakeholders explained that providing unconditional support and help is the only way to reach these gang members.

In Willems & Bosma’s (2006) research on adolescents, there is a great discussion around identity building during crisis moments in life. With this research in mind, it is understandable

why youth join gangs if they are being targeted or bullied at school. By joining the gang, they are finding a means of protection and creating a strong identity, which aligns itself with the gang. Not much research was done around early adulthood, but from the interviews, it seems that at this stage in life gang members are moving out of the need for identity, and into a need for family and sustainable living. Stakeholder 1 discussed that as the gang members he works with age past 21, they begin to move away from gang life, and into parental roles. Gang members do this as they might have a younger brother or sister heading towards a similar life, or in many cases, one or more children to take care of. More research should be conducted around aging out of gangs and the implications for living a meaningful life as an adult and ex-gang member. The key findings of this study include themes of why adolescents make the choice to join gangs, reasoning behind exiting gangs, and methods of supporting a gang member when making the independent choice to exit from a gang.

### **Limitations**

Though all professional stakeholders who were interviewed for this study play a very different professional role, in some form, they are connected to the same agency in Rhode Island. Stakeholder 1, a professor at a small college in Rhode Island, also sits as a board member at an agency, which works with youth around issues of violence. His primary profession is as a professor. Stakeholder 2 is a director for a youth transition center in Rhode Island, which does work with juvenile probation in helping offenders return successfully to the community. However, this agency acts as a contractor to the same agency, which Stakeholder 1 sits on the board for. Participant 2 works on a regular basis with Participant 3. Participant 3 is a caseworker with the same agency, which Participant 1 sits on the board for, and Participant 2 contracts with.



Participant 4 works as a street worker for this same agency. This may have created a bias in the approach these professionals take in working with this population.

A second limitation is the small size of this study. As only four participants responded to the researcher request for an interview, the researcher was unable to interview professionals from different fields of work, who may work directly or indirectly with gangs.

### **Implications for Policy, Practice and Research**

This study is significant for social work policy, practice and research as it suggests a new way of working with gang affiliated youth in Rhode Island. Instead of assuming that the adolescent is in need of exiting a gang, professionals can now analyze why gang life is so important to the youth. We are able to recognize and appreciate the function, which gang involvement provides for youth in Rhode Island. Using this perspective, the professional is meeting the client where they are. We can then assess what the clients strengths are, and provide the client additional means of support. A key element of working with this population is creating and sustaining a respectful relationship with the adolescent. In building a healthy working relationship, the youth will begin to trust and respect the worker, who then might be able to introduce said youth to new life experiences, such as the extreme sports which Stakeholder 3 discussed.

This research confirms that there is not one specific means of helping gang involved youth to exit their respective gang systems. Multiple means must come into play in order to deter a youth from joining a gang, and to aid a member to exit a gang. As Stakeholder 3 (2011) mentions “the focus has to be around keeping kids from joining gangs...What you want to do is, you want to show them opportunities, so that they can see their life without that gang.”

Literature supports the method of calling on the community in order to reduce gang activity in

Rhode Island. Scrimshaw (2007) calls on the community as a means to deter youth from

turning to gang life when he writes:

These are the ingredients for success: Neighborhood and religious groups that can work with police, schools, and public- health and service experts to change the norms that feed violence. A trained network of former gang members who understand the underlying issues, keep a pulse on potential conflict, and step in quickly to negotiate. Strong financial support from federal and local government and from business leaders. A neutral organization such as a university to help draw together groups from across a city and state (Scrimshaw, 2007).

In addition to research regarding community needs, research around gender difference in youth involvement should be considered. The female role was not addressed significantly in the literature found. What is the role of the female in gangs in Rhode Island, and how can our community support females in a manner, which will allow this population to live a safe and meaningful life without gang involvement? Research at the community, state, and national levels should be addressed in order to create and implement standard approaches and supportive plans to help reduce at risk population from joining gangs. As a society we must help at risk populations live meaningful lives without violence by providing strong support systems and access to community based resources.

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## APPENDIX A

Table 1.0- Break Down of Gangs in Rhode Island

<b>Gang Name</b>	<b>Representative Colors &amp; Uniform</b>	<b>Prominent Ethnic Membership</b>	<b>Type of Gang Activity</b>	<b>Gang Symbols &amp; Tags (Tattooing &amp; Graffiti)</b>	<b>Rival Gang</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Size</b>
<b>Hanover Boyz</b>	Navy Blue; Colors of the Los Angeles-based Crips Gang	Predominantly Asian & Latino, with African American and White Membership	Unspecified	HBZ, 8 Duce, 82 & 8226	Young Bloods	West End, & South Side of Providence	60
<b>Young Bloods</b>	Red; This gang aligns itself with the Los Angeles-based Bloods Gang. Red Sox & Cardinal Fitted Hats	Predominantly Asian & Latino, with African American & White Membership	Unspecified	YB, 252	Hanover Boyz	West End, South Side of Providence, & Cranston	60
<b>MS-13; Mara Salvatrucha</b>	Blue; Blue Los Angeles Dodgers baseball Caps; Blue or Tan Dickies with long sleep shirts & top button of shirt buttoned.	Gang derives from Los Angeles, Central America & Mexico. Members are predominantly Latino.	Unspecified	Number 13 with three dots, representing jail, hospital & death. Providence Salvatrucha Locos, Mara, MS-13, XIII and X3.	Not on Record	Providence, Pawtucket, Cranston, Central Falls	100
<b>Almighty Latin King Nation</b>	Black & Gold; Clothing with Crowns	Predominately Latino, with African American Membership	Cocaine and Marijuana Trafficking	5 pointed Crowns & the number 360 representing 360 degrees	Not on Record	Providence with a National Following in NY, CT, & Chicago.	30 in RI.

				strong.			
<b>Laos Pride</b>	Light Blue	Exclusively Laotian	Home Invasions & Fire Arm Usage	LP & 1216	Young Bloods, Tiny Raskal Gang & Laos Out of Control (LOC)	Providence; Smith Hill Area	60
<b>Tiny Raskal Gang</b>	Gray; Use Gray Rags & Dixie Pants.	Predominately Cambodian with Latino, African American & White Members	Unspecified	TRG, 7126; 7 resembles T, 12 resembles R & 6 resembles G	Laos Pride	Providence; Smith Hill & Sorrento Street. Lowell, MA.	30-40
<b>Oriental Rascals</b>	Blue	Cambodian	*Not as active as 10 years ago.	Unspecified	MS-13 & Prov. Street Boyz	West End & Cranston	50-60
<b>Providence Street Boyz</b>	Blue & Red	Cambodians, Latinos, African Americans & Caucasians	*Not as active as 10 years ago.	PSB, 1064	Oriental Rascals	Providence	50-60
<b>Original Crip Gang</b>	Blue	Accepting of all Ethnicities	Unspecified	OCCG, 1537	MS-13	Providence; Mount Pleasant & Chalkstone Avenue	30-35
<b>Dark Side Rascals</b>	Not Recorded	Cambodian	*Junior League of Oriental Rascals	"Dark Side"	Not on Record	Providence	20
<b>Asian Outlaw Boyz</b>	Not Recorded	Asian	Graffiti & Assault	AOB, 12	Not on Record	Cranston	Unkn own
<b>18th Street Gang</b>	Blue	Guatemalan, Asian, Latino, African American	Fraud, Assault; Favor use of Bats & Knives	666 & XVIII	MS-13	West End of Providence	25

Note: Adapted from: The Providence Journal. *The Gangs Of Providence*. Retrieved from <http://www.projo.com/extra/2008/gangs>, September 15, 2010.

APPENDIX B  
**Informed Consent**

Dear Potential Participant:

I am a senior Social Work major at Providence College, inviting you to participate in a study regarding safe exit plans and crisis intervention for gang affiliated youth. Information gathered from this study will remain confidential; however will be shared in a research paper for the social work course.

I am currently seeking professionals engaged in urban communities whom work with gang affiliated youth. Participation will involve an interview of approximately one hour regarding gang patterns and exit strategies. Interviews will be recording using a digital voice recorder. These tapes will be stored in a secure location at Providence College, and will be disposed of after the research is complete.

There are no anticipated significant risks associated with involvement in this research. Participants are free to cease participation at any time until identifying information is removed from responses.

Confidentiality of participants will be protected by storing signed consent forms separately from data obtained in the study. Once the data are obtained (and the written descriptions and secondary elaborations are linked), all identifying information linking the participant to his or her response will be destroyed so that responses can no longer be identified with individuals. Brief excerpts of individual responses may be quoted without any personal identifying information.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time until the researcher has removed the link between your response and identifying data.

**YOUR RETURN OF THIS PAPER INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE ABOVE INFORMATION AND THAT YOU HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, YOUR PARTICIPATION, AND YOUR RIGHTS AND THAT YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.**

### Interview Questions

Name:

Date of Interview:

Age & Gender:

Affiliation/Type of Agency:

Number of Years of Professional Involvement with Gangs:

Professional Training or development:

1. What is your involvement with gang members?
2. How did you become interested in this area of practice?
3. What do you think are the major reasons why individuals join gangs in this community?
4. What types of gangs do you work with? What is the typical behavior of the individual?
5. What support systems are available for persons attempting to exit a gang?
6. Do you believe that there is a safe manner to exit a gang?
7. What is your protocol in intervening in gang violence? Is this a standard protocol?
8. Have you ever aided in helping a youth exit a gang?
9. Are there consequences in leaving a gang, for the gang member?
10. In what ways can this community improve means for individuals to exit gangs?