

## Section 1:

# Development of OJJDP's Comprehensive Gang Model



## Research Foundation of the Comprehensive Gang Model

**T**he Comprehensive Gang Model is the product of a national gang research and development program that OJJDP initiated in the mid-1980s. A national assessment of gang problems and programs provided the research foundation for the Model, and its key components mirror the best features of existing and evaluated programs across the country.

### National Assessment of Gang Problems and Programs

In 1987, OJJDP launched a Juvenile Gang Suppression and Intervention Research and Development Program that Dr. Irving Spergel of the University of Chicago directed. In the initial phase, the researchers conducted the first comprehensive national assessment of organized agency and community group responses to gang problems in the United States (Spergel, 1990, 1991; Spergel and Curry, 1993). It remains the only national assessment of efforts to combat gangs. In the second phase, Spergel and his colleagues developed a composite youth gang program based on findings from the national assessment.

In the research phase of the project (phase one), Spergel's research team attempted to identify every promising community gang program in the United States based on a national survey. At the outset, this study focused on 101 cities in which the presence of gangs was suspected. The team found promising gang programs in a broad range of communities across the Nation. Once programs and sites were identified, the team collected information on the magnitude and nature of local gang problems from representatives of each agency or organization that other

participants identified as being affiliated with or being a partner in each local program. Spergel and his team of researchers interviewed program developers and reviewed all available program documentation.

The more demanding project goal was to identify the contents of each program and self-reported measures of success. The team made an effort to identify the "most promising" programs. In each of the most promising community programs, the research team identified the agencies that were essential to the success of the program. Finally, Spergel and his team made site visits to selected community programs and agencies.

Spergel and Curry (1993, pp. 371–72) used agency representatives' responses to five survey questions<sup>1</sup> to determine the strategies that communities across the country employed in dealing with gang problems. From respondents' answers to these questions, the research team identified five strategies—community mobilization, social intervention, provision of opportunities, organizational change and development, and suppression (see "Five Strategies in OJJDP's Comprehensive Gang Model" on page 2).<sup>2</sup>

## Development of the Comprehensive Community-Wide Gang Program Model

Spergel and his colleagues (Spergel, 1995; Spergel et al., 1992; Spergel and Curry, 1993) developed the Comprehensive Community-Wide Gang Program Model as the final product of the gang research and development program that OJJDP funded. From the information gathered through its multimethod study in phase one (Spergel, Curry, et al., 1994), the Spergel team developed technical assistance manuals for each of the 12 types of agencies that should be part of a successful local community response to gangs, including organizations that range from grassroots child-serving agencies to law enforcement, courts, and prosecutors' offices (Spergel, Chance, et al., 1994).

Spergel and his colleagues also offered the general community design of an ideal Comprehensive Community-Wide Gang Program Model. An ideal program should undertake several action steps (Spergel, Chance, et al., 1994, pp. 2–5):

- **Addressing the problem.** A community must recognize the presence of a gang problem before it can do anything meaningful to address the problem.
- **Organization and policy development.** Communities must organize effectively to combat the youth gang problem.
- **Management of the collaborative process.** In a typical community, the mobilization process evolves through several stages before fruition.
- **Development of goals and objectives.** These must include short-term suppression and outreach services for targeted youth, and longer term services, such as remedial education, training, and job placement.
- **Relevant programming.** The community must systematically articulate and implement rationales for services, tactics, or procedures.
- **Coordination and community participation.** A mobilized community is the most promising way to deal with the gang problem.
- **Youth accountability.** While youth gang members must be held accountable for their criminal acts, they must at the same time be provided an opportunity to change or control their behavior.
- **Staffing.** Youth gang intervention and control efforts require a thorough understanding of the complexity of gang activity in the context of local community life.
- **Staff training.** Training should include prevention, intervention, and suppression in gang problem localities.

## ■ ■ ■ Five Strategies in OJJDP's Comprehensive Gang Model

**Community Mobilization:** Involvement of local citizens, including former gang-involved youth, community groups, agencies, and coordination of programs and staff functions within and across agencies.

**Opportunities Provision:** Development of a variety of specific education, training, and employment programs targeting gang-involved youth.

**Social Intervention:** Involving youth-serving agencies, schools, grassroots groups, faith-based organizations, police, and other juvenile/criminal justice organizations in "reaching out" to gang-involved youth and their families,

and linking them with the conventional world and needed services.

**Suppression:** Formal and informal social control procedures, including close supervision and monitoring of gang-involved youth by agencies of the juvenile/criminal justice system and also by community-based agencies, schools, and grassroots groups.

**Organizational Change and Development:** Development and implementation of policies and procedures that result in the most effective use of available and potential resources, within and across agencies, to better address the gang problem.

Source: Spergel, 1995, pp. 171–296.

- **Research and evaluation.** Determining what is most effective, and why, is a daunting challenge.
- **Establishment of funding priorities.** Based on available research, theory, and experience, community mobilization strategies and programs should be accorded the highest funding priority.

In 1993, Spergel began to implement this model in a neighborhood in Chicago. Soon thereafter, OJJDP renamed the model the Comprehensive Gang Prevention and Intervention Model (Spergel, Chance, et al., 1994, p. iii).

## OJJDP's Comprehensive Gang Model

The 1992 amendments to the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act authorized OJJDP to carry out additional activities to address youth gang problems. An OJJDP Gang Task Force outlined plans for integrated office-wide efforts to provide national leadership in the areas of gang-related program development, research, statistics, evaluation, training, technical assistance, and information dissemination (Howell, 1994; Tatem-Kelley, 1994).

This background work led to the establishment of OJJDP's Comprehensive Response to America's Youth Gang Problem. The Comprehensive Response was a five-component initiative that included establishment of the National Youth Gang Center, demonstration and testing of OJJDP's Comprehensive Gang Model, training and technical assistance to communities implementing this Model, evaluation of the demonstration sites implementing the Model, and information dissemination through the Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse. Implementation and testing of the Comprehensive Gang Model were the centerpiece of the initiative. OJJDP prepared two publications specifically to support demonstration and testing of the Model: *Gang Suppression and Intervention: Problem and Response* (Spergel, Curry, et al., 1994), and *Gang Suppression and Intervention: Community Models* (Spergel, Chance, et al., 1994).

Communities that use the Comprehensive Gang Model will benefit from the simplified implementation process that OJJDP has created. OJJDP synthesized the elements of the Comprehensive Gang Model into five steps:

1. The community and its leaders acknowledge the youth gang problem.
2. The community conducts an assessment of the nature and scope of the youth gang problem, leading to the identification of a target community or communities and population(s).
3. Through a steering committee, the community and its leaders set goals and objectives to address the identified problem(s).
4. The steering committee makes available relevant programs, strategies, services, tactics, and procedures consistent with the Model's five core strategies.
5. The steering committee evaluates the effectiveness of the response to the gang problem, reassesses the problem, and modifies approaches, as needed.

These steps have been tested in several settings. Information on those initiatives is provided in appendix A.

## The Comprehensive Gang Model in Action—OJJDP's Gang Reduction Program

Over the years, OJJDP has tested and refined the Comprehensive Gang Model to meet new challenges and address gang problems in new locations. Most recently, OJJDP developed and funded the Gang Reduction Program.

Gangs are often the result of system failures or community dysfunction. So, to address youth gang violence, the OJJDP Administrator decided to test whether the Model could be used to initiate community change in certain cities. In 2003, OJJDP identified four demonstration sites: Los Angeles, CA; Richmond, VA; Milwaukee, WI; and North Miami Beach, FL. Each test site faced a different gang problem.

Once sites had been identified, OJJDP held meetings with senior political and law enforcement officials and made an offer: OJJDP would provide resources to support a test of the Comprehensive Gang Model if the city agreed to change how they currently addressed youth gang problems. Each city would now focus on balancing gang prevention with enforcement and commit to using community organizations and faith-based groups to ultimately sustain the work. Additionally, each site would have a full-time coordinator, funded by OJJDP, with direct access to senior political and police leadership. This coordinator would be free from substantive program responsibilities and would ensure that each participating agency or organization met its obligations. He or she would also ensure and that the data and information generated by the effort would be collected and shared. Each participating agency remained independent, but was under the oversight of the gang coordinator, who had the ability to obtain support or intervention from OJJDP leadership and local authorities (e.g., mayor, police chief, or governor).

In addition to reducing gang violence, the goal of GRP was to determine the necessary practices to create a community environment that helps reduce youth gang crime and violence in targeted neighborhoods. Because of this, GRP focused on two goals: to learn the key ingredients for success and to reduce youth gang delinquency, crime, and violence. GRP accomplishes these goals by helping communities take an integrated approach when targeting gangs:

- **Primary prevention** targets the entire population in high-crime and high-risk communities. The key component is a One-Stop Resource Center that makes services accessible and visible to members of the community. Services include prenatal and infant care, afterschool activities, truancy and dropout prevention, and job programs.
- **Secondary prevention** identifies young children (ages 7–14) at high risk and—drawing on the resources of

schools, community-based organizations, and faith-based groups—intervenes with appropriate services before early problem behaviors turn into serious delinquency and gang involvement.

- **Intervention** targets active gang members and close associates, and involves aggressive outreach and recruitment activity. Support services for gang-involved youth and their families help youth make positive choices.
- **Suppression** focuses on identifying the most dangerous and influential gang members and removing them from the community.
- **Reentry** targets serious offenders who are returning to the community after confinement and provides appropriate services and monitoring. Of particular interest are displaced gang members who may cause conflict by attempting to reassert their former gang roles.

The program has several key concepts:

- Identify needs at the individual, family, and community levels, and address those needs in a coordinated and comprehensive response.
- Conduct an inventory of human and financial resources in the community, and create plans to fill gaps and leverage existing resources to support effective gang-reduction strategies.
- Apply the best research-based programs across appropriate age ranges, risk categories, and agency boundaries.
- Encourage coordination and integration in two directions: vertically (local, State, and Federal agencies) and horizontally (across communities and program types).

Highlights of activities from each of the Gang Reduction Program sites—Richmond, VA; Los Angeles, CA; North Miami Beach, FL; and Milwaukee, WI—are presented in the next section.