



TAKING BACK VANCOUVER'S STREETS

THE TRUTH ABOUT GANGS

THE MYTHS AND REALITIES OF GANGS IN VANCOUVER

PLANNING, RESEARCH & AUDIT

FEBRUARY 2010



VANCOUVER POLICE DEPARTMENT
Beyond the Call

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	1
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	2
FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO REPORT GANG ACTIVITY	3
A TRIBUTE TO INNOCENCE LOST	4
INTRODUCTION	7
ORIENTATION TO GANGS	9
GANG TYPES	10
<i>Street Level/Entry Level Youth Gangs.....</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Organized (Mid-Level) Gangs</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Organized Gangs (High Level/Organized Crime)</i>	<i>11</i>
THE 3 R'S OF GANG CULTURE:	12
1. Reputation	12
2. Respect.....	13
3. Retaliation/Revenge	13
MYTHS ABOUT GANGS.....	15
<i>Gang Members Have Lots of Money</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Gangs Give You Improved Status/Identity.....</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Gang Members Maintain a Glorious and Exciting Lifestyle.....</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Kids Join Gangs to Escape Poverty or Abuse.....</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Gang Members are Loyal.....</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Gangs Will Protect You</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Gangs Are Untouchable.....</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Gangs Only Commit Violence against Other Gang Members.....</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>The Courts Don't Take Gang Violence Seriously</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>Legalization of Drugs Will Reduce Gang Activity.....</i>	<i>18</i>
CHARACTERISTICS OF NOTE FOR PARENTS AND TEACHERS.....	19
GANGS IN VANCOUVER.....	22
CHALLENGES TO RESEARCHING GANGS	24
THE RESPONSE TO GANGS.....	26
CHALLENGES TO INVESTIGATIONS OF GANG MEMBERS	29
<i>Intimidation</i>	<i>29</i>
<i>Communication.....</i>	<i>30</i>
<i>Jurisdiction</i>	<i>30</i>
<i>Diversification of Criminal Business Lines</i>	<i>30</i>
<i>Dangerousness</i>	<i>30</i>
POLICE SUCCESSES WITH GANGS	32
CONCLUSIONS	33
GETTING OUT.....	35

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was a collaborative effort between numerous individuals and units within the Vancouver Police Department, as well as several external partners and former employees. The Planning, Research & Audit Section would like to extend sincere appreciation to everyone who submitted materials, wrote sections, offered their opinions, or shared their stories in order to bring this report to life.

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO REPORT GANG ACTIVITY

There are several resources available to report gang activity or to request further information:

- To report information on gang activity, call 911 or if the preference is to remain anonymous, call CrimeStoppers at 1-800- 222- TIPS (or 8477).
- Email the Vancouver Police Department Youth Services Unit at youth.services@vpd.ca or call 311 and ask to speak to someone in the Youth Services Unit or the Gang Crime Unit. The operator will transfer the call.
- The Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General supports the “Youth against Violence Line”. This is a toll-free, 24/7 help line for young people to speak one-on-one, anonymously and in confidence with a support worker. The phone number for this service is 1-800-680-4264 or email at info@youthagainstviolenceline.com.

A TRIBUTE TO INNOCENCE LOST

RACHEL DAVIS AND RICHARD HUI

Tied Together in Tragedy



Rachel Davis (23 years old)

After graduating from high school in Stratford Ontario, Rachel Davis headed west on a road trip to Arizona, seeking spiritual enlightenment. Her journey was interrupted when her van broke down in Chicago. However, Rachel continued westward and paused to work in Lake Louise, Alberta for the 1999-2000 winter ski season.

Rachel left her job in Lake Louise early to head to Vancouver to help her sister Celine with her two children. Rachel cared very much for her family and returned to help her sister again in 2003 after travelling around B.C. for a time.

By 2003, Rachel was moving forward with her life and beginning to establish herself in Vancouver. She was well known and respected among the skateboard community in the Lower Mainland. Rachel had planned to begin studying at Langara in early 2004, in order to become either a lawyer or a family therapist. She was known to speak her mind and she had the courage to step in and defend others.

Richard Hui (25 years old)

In late 2003, Richard Hui was a young man trying to find his way in the world, with dreams of starting his own business. He had many friends and was close with his family. His family was so important to him, that in 2001, he moved in with his sister Gloria to help her deal with a recent divorce. Richard helped Gloria to move on and “live again”, and took on the role of her protector.

January 3rd, 2004

On the night of January 3rd, 2004, both Rachel and Richard went out separately with friends for a night on the town and ended up at the Purple Onion Cabaret in Gastown.

Imran Sharif was also out that night. He and his friends drove into downtown and decided to go to the Purple Onion. They parked their car in Gastown, within close proximity of the bar. One of the friends stayed in the car, with the gun that Sharif had brought out with him that evening.

Although not associated to a specific gang, Sharif was active in the dial-a-dope business, selling cocaine and heroin. In fact, on the night of January 3rd, 2004, he was out on bail and awaiting sentencing after pleading guilty to a drug trafficking charge in November of 2003.

At the bar's closing, Sharif began flirting with a woman. Two men, one of whom was the woman's boyfriend, took exception to Sharif's advances. An altercation ensued and Sharif was punched. This escalated into a brawl between Sharif and his friends and a second group which included Richard Hui. The fight moved outside the bar to the sidewalk. At one point, one Indo-Canadian male (believed to be a friend of Sharif's) was being assaulted by several Asian males. He was down on the sidewalk and being kicked.

At this point, Rachel Davis left the bar and observed the fight. She intervened, and appealed for calm, getting between the combatants and the victim on the ground.

During this frenzy, Sharif had called his friend in the car and told him to bring the gun to the bar. Once Sharif was given the gun, he opened fire at the crowd seriously wounding five bystanders with shots to the head, neck and shoulder areas.

Tragically, two of Sharif's bullets also found their way to Rachel and Richard, who were both killed instantly at the scene.

Sharif was arrested and ultimately found guilty of two counts of first degree murder and five counts of attempted murder. His appeals were denied in 2009. He will not be eligible for parole until 2029.

Rachel Davis received the Vancouver Police Certificate of Merit in April 2005, and was awarded the Governor General's Medal of Bravery in May 2007, both posthumously. The Rachel Davis Foundation was created in her memory by her family. Each year, the foundation gives a Rachel Davis Award to a young person who, through an outstanding act of integrity, kindness or compassion, has affected the lives of others in a meaningful way. Rachel's life was also honoured by the skateboarding community at a City of North Vancouver skate park in January 2004.

The lives of the Davis and Hui families are irreparably changed. Gang violence has impacted them in ways that are unimaginable. The past can't be changed but lessons can be learned to take forward into the future. That is the hope of the Vancouver Police Department in the fight to take back the streets of Vancouver.

INTRODUCTION

The Vancouver Police Department (VPD) has an extensive history working to fight gang activity in the city of Vancouver. The VPD Gang Crime Unit (GCU) started in 1989 in response to the growing number of criminal gangs operating in Vancouver. Since that time, the GCU has maintained a presence in Vancouver as a relentless, ever-present element in the fight against gang crime. More recently, the GCU has moved to a project-oriented enforcement model that has proven to have great success.

In September of 2008, many leaders in policing from across the Lower Mainland met following a significant increase in violent gang-related crime, including homicides, in the region. It was decided that several enforcement agencies across the Lower Mainland would take responsibility for the criminal groups that posed the greatest risk to the public. The VPD was tasked with gang activity occurring on the "South Slope" of Vancouver (southeast Vancouver). The Sanghera crime group was in the crosshairs of the VPD almost immediately having been identified as the most dangerous criminal element in this geographic area.

Project Rebellion was initiated to target the gang violence in this area, and between October 2008 and April 2009, the VPD amassed evidence to support over 200 charges against 28 individuals tied to the Sanghera crime group. The most violent of those charged were detained by the courts. Project Rebellion was so successful that it decimated the criminal activities of the Sanghera crime group and effectively shut down the gang. It also identified the need for relentless enforcement against such gangs. While the Sanghera crime group was effectively dismantled due to Project Rebellion, it quickly became clear that another gang was poised to take its place. In response to this reality, Project Torrent was developed and initiated in order to target the up-and-coming gang members. It too has been successful with multiple arrests and charges forthcoming.

The VPD has developed considerable expertise in gang enforcement. The lessons learned over the past 20 years of gang crime enforcement coupled with the recent success of several initiatives have made us leaders in the fight against gang crime. The VPD would like to share some of its knowledge with the view of providing a snapshot of gang crime in the city of

Vancouver, providing parents with a guideline for danger signs to watch for in their children, dispel several myths about the gang lifestyle, and highlight recent VPD successes.

ORIENTATION TO GANGS

Misconceptions about what defines a gang are plentiful in all forms of media and popular culture. We are inundated with movies, television programs, news reports and documentaries, primarily from the USA, which depict gangs as primarily organized along racial lines, with origins in impoverished areas of the inner city. The reality in Vancouver is quite different, and this document will shed light on some of the popular misconceptions, and present a more local analysis of gangs specific to Vancouver.

Although numerous definitions exist for what constitutes a gang, for orienting purposes the VPD provides the following general description: A gang is an organized group of youths and/or adults who form an alliance for the common purpose of committing criminal acts by relying on group intimidation and violence. There is generally some benefit for either an individual in the group or for the group as a whole. A gang is not a group of youths who are “hanging out,” nor is a gang a group of people of the same race associating with each other. A gang forms so it can rely on “strength in numbers” and commit criminal, often violent acts.

Gangs in Vancouver are not “specialists;” rather, they tend to be involved in numerous types of crimes for varying reasons and motivations. These may include property crimes, robberies, assaults, frauds, extortions and even contract murders. However, despite this diversity in criminality, the most common activity associated with gangs is drug trafficking. Where there are drugs being sold, there will be gangs. Where there are gangs, there will be guns and violence. This violence can be expressive and/or instrumental, and can be used for many reasons, including:

- Protecting their enterprise from competition or rivals
- Personal protection from enemies
- Establishing a code of silence to prevent other gang members from “ratting them out”
- Intimidating witnesses or victims
- Establishing or maintaining their status within their gang

Gang Types

In Vancouver, the local gangs can generally be thought of as fitting within three levels of sophistication and organization. These can be typified as the street or entry level gangs, the organizing mid-level gangs, and the organized or high-level gangs.

Street Level/Entry Level Youth Gangs

These gangs are typically made up of individuals ranging in age from their early teens to early 20s. The gangs are usually loosely organized and have very little structure. They are involved in a variety of crimes including low-level drug trafficking, robberies, extortions and property crime. In Vancouver, many robberies occur in and around Skytrain stations where items such as MP3 players and expensive clothing are targeted. These groups are usually made up of individuals who are generally associated to specific neighbourhoods within communities or to communities themselves (e.g., East Vancouver). Possibly due to the loose organizational structure, members have been known to move in and out of these groups or simply leave the gang life altogether for various reasons. However, it is not uncommon for individuals to move up to higher levels of criminal activity where it is perceived that there is more wealth, status and power.

Some street-level gangs may be associated to higher-level gangs, which control certain areas of criminal activity such as drug trafficking. Although many aspire to move up in the organization, many youths start off by engaging in a form of drug trafficking called “dial-a-doping,” whereby drug users can call a phone number and have their drugs delivered to them much like an individual would order a pizza. By having the recruited youths do the actual drug trafficking, the older, more senior members of the gang are insulated from enforcement and prosecution.

Many street-level gangs recruit youths from high schools to get involved in this form of criminal activity. These gangs do not hesitate to use weapons such as knives, batons, bats, pepper spray and even firearms. These gangs are also known to travel in large numbers and can organize themselves on short notice.

Organized (Mid-Level) Gangs

Criminal organizations most often categorized as “gangs” occupy this tier. Participants are often focussed on personal and gang image, at times forgoing the essentials of life in favour of driving

a flashy vehicle, wearing branded clothing and carrying firearms or wearing body armour to promote the “gangster” image.

Typically, members of mid-level gangs tend to be older than street level gang members, are more organized and are more sophisticated. There is often a defined leader who has some longevity and is more likely to engage in diversified crime types. There is also a much higher degree of capital involved. The success of these mid-level gangs may involve networking with criminals from other areas or even other countries.

Most mid-level gang members have immediate access to weapons and will use them when required to protect their “turf” (be it geographic or commodity-related), and will aggressively protect or expand whatever industry they are running (such as drug trafficking). Violence is also used when egos are bruised or threats to power are perceived within the group. Firearms are readily available to these groups and are frequently used to resolve conflicts. Like street-level gangs, these groups are often associated to high-level organized crime groups.

Some contemporary examples of this level of gang include the Red Scorpions (Bacon group), the Independent Soldiers and the United Nations Gang (Clayton Roueche).

Organized Gangs (High Level/Organized Crime)

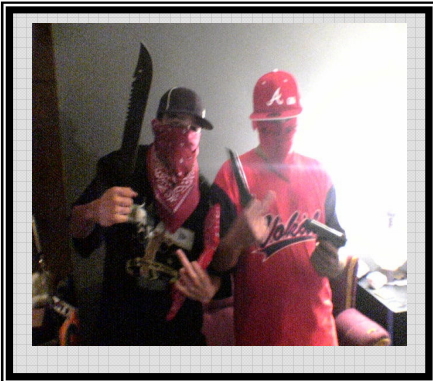
Organized crime gangs typically have the highest degree of sophistication, influence, structure, wealth and power. Many individuals have amassed enough money over the long term that they are able to enter into legal business ventures to legitimize their wealth. Organized crime gang members are typically very well-insulated from the criminal activity they control; thus, they may appear legitimate to the public and are very hard to prosecute. There are many organized crime gangs in British Columbia which include, but are not limited to, outlaw motorcycle gangs (OMG) and Asian organized crime groups. They operate on a worldwide basis and control huge areas of criminal activities.

The 3 R's of Gang Culture¹:

Whatever level a gang member belongs to, they will almost always follow the same code of conduct. Because they are involved in criminal activity, they will often use violence or threats to resolve any conflicts and to protect their enterprise. To understand it better, gang culture can be broken down into the 3 R's: Reputation, Respect, and Retaliation/Revenge.

1. Reputation

One of the most important concerns to a gang and/or its members is their reputation. Reputation (also known as "rep" or "street cred") is generally based on the commission of violent acts meant to impress other gang members or to intimidate members of the public. Individual gang members also attempt to build their own reputations in order to improve their status within their gang. As a result, bold and brash individuals are willing to take extreme risks in order to establish their reputations.



To members of a gang, reputation translates into power and control. The more power and control a gang has, the more money the gang will make. The gang therefore believes that its ability to make money is largely based on how "bad" their reputation is. Furthermore, the higher the individual gang member's status is within the gang, the more money he will make.

The Internet is now a favourite tool of many gang members trying to build up their reputation. Police have located numerous photos and videos of known gang members on the Internet openly admitting their membership in gangs and commission of crimes. They are even seen posing with weapons such as knives, machetes, bear spray and even firearms.

¹ Understanding Youth and Gangs: A Parent Resource; South Asian Community Coalition Against Youth Violence

2. Respect

Just like members of the general public, gang members also seek respect from others; however, unlike most others, gang members gain respect through violence, threats or intimidation. The “higher” the reputation, the more respect the gang feels it deserves. Even within their own gang, members must show respect to gang members who have a higher status than they do. Violence is usually the reaction to anyone who does not show respect or hurts the reputation of anyone in the gang.

3. Retaliation/Revenge

In gang culture, the prevailing sentiment is that every act of disrespect towards a gang member must be answered to and retaliated against. Once a gang has established its reputation, members will use any and all means to protect it, even if that necessitates committing violent crimes such as murder to send the message to others who dare to cross them.

“Taxing” is a term which refers to a monetary amount demanded by a gang to compensate for an act committed against the gang or a gang member. It could be as simple as a “look” one youth gives another that is misinterpreted. The second youth would then demand the jacket or MP3 player of the first youth as payment for looking at him the wrong way. This is becoming prevalent in some high schools in Vancouver.

Many violent gang related incidents stem from minor altercations which take place between rival gangs. These altercations can result in drive-by shootings, stabbings, fights, assaults and “taxing.” Due mostly to their immediate and easy access to weapons, many gang members use violence to communicate. This places everyone at risk, as these violent altercations may break out in public areas and can impact innocent bystanders.

While giving the VPD presentation “The Truth about Gangs” at a local high school, talk turned to snitching. The officer giving the presentation noticed a youth standing in the back of the class wearing an anti-snitching T-shirt like this one:



Gang members make concerted efforts to stop people from telling school officials or police about unlawful activities. Gang members promote anti-snitching campaigns to create fear of retaliation in anyone thinking of reporting gang activity. In some communities, people are so fearful of reporting criminal activity that they will not call the police

even when they themselves are victims, for fear of being labelled a “snitch” or a “rat.” Once a person is labelled a “snitch,” efforts are made to silence them, often with the use of violence.

Anti-snitching campaigns also permeate popular mainstream culture, as numerous rap artists and others support the campaign in their public persona by sporting symbols and other mainstream clothing lines containing catchy sayings such as “snitches get stitches.”

MYTHS ABOUT GANGS

A number of myths about gangs have been perpetuated in the media. One of the goals of this document is to dispel some common myths such as:

Gang Members Have Lots of Money

Most gang members the VPD has investigated in the past year do not have a lot of money to live on from day-to-day. Any money that is made must be shared among many hands and is then quickly spent. Investigators have seen gang members openly fret about how little money they have, to the point of running home to their parents' houses in order to eat. Investigators also know of gang members who are openly depressed about their financial predicaments.

Being in a gang is also very stressful. Gang investigators have seen many gang members lose a drug shipment or fail to complete a planned crime. The gang member is then indebted to the senior gang members for the "business loss" and is under extreme pressure to make amends. The lure of making a lot of money is very hard to resist for a young person. Most money-making schemes for gangs are illegal and involve drug trafficking, robberies, and thefts. The reality is that young/junior gang members must take huge risks and make very little money.

Gangs Give You Improved Status/Identity

Youths believe they will get some kind of identity or status from joining a gang. This is often reinforced by celebrities, such as rappers, who will market themselves and portray the "gangster" lifestyle in their music, fashion and lifestyle. Gangsters often try adding to the appeal by travelling in expensive, flashy vehicles or by wearing very expensive designer clothing. What this actually does is draw the attention of police, school officials and parents and make it more difficult for them to engage in gang activities.

Gang Members Maintain a Glorious and Exciting Lifestyle

Gang recruiters are very convincing and will try to make the lifestyle as attractive and exciting to kids as possible. Gang recruiters promise youth money, sex, status and reputation. They claim that everyone will like and respect the youth if he joins the gang. Popular entertainment

sources such as video games, movies and music videos glorify gangs. The reality is that the youth rarely see the money made from criminal enterprises, and the "excitement" is generally in the form of criminal activity and usually comes at the expense of his education, job and family.

Community partnerships such as Bar Watch and Restaurant Watch have made it difficult for gang members to socialize in public. As an example, during the past New Year's Eve, one gang member asked a VPD Gang Crime Unit detective for permission to party in Vancouver and was told "no." That same night, a large number of gang members were evicted from nightclubs on Granville Street and were openly dejected as they were left without any activities for the evening.

"He said he wanted out. He told another kid, 'Don't do it. It's not a very good life. I'm getting out of it,'" Wendy Richards, mother of Ryan Richards, involved with the Red Scorpion gang, who was 19 when his body was found behind a produce shop.

Kids Join Gangs to Escape Poverty or Abuse

While some individuals join gangs to escape poverty or abuse, many Vancouver gang members come from middle-class families. They are attracted to the gang lifestyle by the perception of "glitz and glamour and easy money." It is a career choice of sorts and it is a choice made amidst other opportunities.

Gang Members are Loyal

Gang members protecting their own may have actually occurred at one time in the gang culture.

Citing former members of gangs like the Red Scorpions as examples of high-profile gang members turned informants, the Abbotsford Police Department's Cst. Ian MacDonald said gang loyalty isn't what it used to be.

"At the end of the day, despite being part of a group, these individuals will always look out for themselves first."

Metro Vancouver gangs 'loaded' with informants: police
By Rafe Arnott, Abbotsford Times
January 12, 2010

This is now a myth. Allegiances change daily and are affected by ego, greed and personal motivation of individual gang members. Given the opportunity, they will choose to look after themselves. Loyalty is often based on convenience and whether the gang members have something to offer (usually financial) to the group. If they don't, they will be discounted and in some cases disposed of.

Gangs Will Protect You

Many youths believe that joining a gang will protect them from other gangs. They think that “no one will mess with them” now that they have the protection of their gang. The reality is that the youths will gain many enemies and face the real risk of being killed for being a part of a gang. Threats and violence may also be used to force the youths to feel that they have no choice but to join a gang.

Another reality is that once the youth is part of the gang, should he be perceived as a “rat” or if it is believed that he has offended some of the more senior members of the gang or cheated the gang of money or product, he could easily be killed by his own gang. A gang is unable to protect its own but fully capable of killing its own, and quite willing to do so with little provocation or hesitation.

Gangs Are Untouchable

There is a myth that gangs are virtually untouchable and no effective means of disrupting their activities exist. Many citizens, and even some police officers, believe the gang problem is so severe and so wide-reaching that efforts to curb their activities are doomed to fail. This is not the case. There have been several successful police initiatives of late such as Project Rebellion that have effectively dismantled the criminal activities of active crime groups in Vancouver.

Gangs Only Commit Violence against Other Gang Members

Sadly, this is not the case. Innocent people have been caught in the crossfire of gang violence.

- In November 2005, 40-year-old Laurie Tinga was watching TV in her home when she was struck by a stray bullet from a gun battle in the courtyard of her Port Moody townhouse complex. The bullet caused brain damage, sentencing Laurie to a wheelchair.
- In January 2007, Kirk Holifield was shot and killed because his truck resembled a vehicle used by the brother of a suspected gang member who had previously been involved in a shoot-out.
- In August 2007, suspected gang members opened fire in the Fortune Happiness restaurant in Vancouver and shot 8 people, killing 2. Although the targets were suspected gang members, at least 15 innocent people were eating in the same restaurant when the gunmen opened fire.
- Similarly, in September 2007, two individuals were shot at the Kitsilano area restaurant “Quattro on Fourth” during a birthday party.

- Another two innocent lives were lost in Surrey in October 2007 when Ed Schellenberg, a 55-year-old father of two from Abbotsford and Chris Mohan, a 22-year-old student were killed. Four known gang members were murdered during the same incident.

The Courts Don't Take Gang Violence Seriously

There is a myth that if gang members commit an offence the courts will simply let them out the next day. This is no longer the case. Recent decisions have shown that in addition to primary and secondary grounds, tertiary² reasons are being considered to detain someone post-arrest and-charge for gang-related offences. For example, Udham Sanghera and Gordon Taylor were both remanded under tertiary grounds by a Provincial Court judge following their arrests for firearms possession during Project Rebellion. This decision was upheld by the Supreme Court of British Columbia. Both of these individuals were members of the Sanghera crime group.

Legalization of Drugs Will Reduce Gang Activity

There has been much discussion in the media over whether the legalization of drugs such as marihuana would reduce violence in society and in particular reduce gang violence. The fact that gangs have diversified their criminal business lines indicates that this will have little impact on gang violence. While most gangs still engage in drug activities, that is not their only source of income. There are other crimes such as debit card fraud, murder for hire, and large-scale organized thefts that are bringing in more money than dial-a-dope operations. Thus, the legalization of drugs would likely have little impact on gang activity or gang violence; they would simply focus on exporting to other countries and/or turn to other crime types. They would not for example, "get a real job."

² There are three reasons to detain someone under the Criminal Code. Section 515(10) states that the detention of an accused in custody is justified only on one or more of the following grounds:

- a. primary grounds: where the detention is necessary to ensure his or her attendance in court
- b. secondary grounds: where the detention is necessary for the protection or safety of the public, including any victim of or witness to the offence, having regard to all the circumstances including any substantial likelihood that the accused will, if released from custody, commit a criminal offence or interfere with the administration of justice; and
- c. tertiary grounds: if the detention is necessary to maintain confidence in the administration of justice

CHARACTERISTICS OF NOTE FOR PARENTS AND TEACHERS

Several VPD School Liaison Officers and members of the Youth Services Unit have observed some specific characteristics of youth who may have a tendency to get involved in gang activities. Some characteristics of note:

1. **STRONG DESIRE FOR PEER ACCEPTANCE:** Often youths who are having a difficult time fitting into groups within the school or community will be recruited to join a gang. These youths want to belong to “something” and unfortunately it will frequently end up being a gang.
2. **POOR ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE:** Most known gang members don’t finish high school. The attraction of the gang lifestyle and the “shifts” they must work to commit the crimes they are tasked with by the gang leaders are not conducive to staying in school. As the youths miss more school, grades suffer and they eventually stop going altogether. Often, the youth is so tired from “working” all night that he does not possess the ability to be successful in school because he is too tired to concentrate. This contributes to his poor performance in school and leads to eventually dropping out or expulsion.
3. **LOW SELF-ESTEEM:** This is a hook for many recruiters. The youth with low self-esteem is susceptible to any form of ego-based incentives which make him feel like he belongs, that he is valued in the group and cared for by his new group of “friends.”
4. **RECENT IMMIGRANT:** Lack of understanding of how gangs work, lack of awareness that gangs exist, and the desire to “belong” in their new community or school create a perfect set of circumstances for the recruitment of new immigrants into a gang. By the time the youths realize that they are immersed in a gang and not a group of friends, it is too late and it becomes very difficult to get out.
5. **DRUG USE:** Youths are inherently curious and are often willing to try new things. Often this can include drug experimentation. Gang recruiters will often give drugs to potential recruits to draw them into the gang lifestyle. This frequently leads to the youths either

owing a debt to the gang which has to be repaid with interest or to the youths working for the gang to repay the money owed.

6. **PARENTAL AWARENESS AND SUPPORT:** Some parents are not involved in the lives of their children. They do not ask about their children's activities, and do not expect to be told unsolicited. This allows youths the freedom to engage in gang activities, miss school, and go unchallenged by parents when they bring home expensive clothing that they cannot legitimately afford. This makes it much easier for youths to quickly become immersed in the gang culture.

"You gotta be proud of him, he never rolled over," his father Rupert "Rip" Roueche, 66, said Thursday in an interview at his Abbotsford home. "That's why he got 30 years, because they couldn't break him. He wouldn't turn informant." "Not like those other wimps down there, that took him down. If everybody would have been above-board he'd still be walking on the streets." "If the rest of the world had his balls, there wouldn't be any problem."

- Quotes from Clay Roueche's father: Clay Roueche's dad proud of son who 'never rolled over' by Ethan Baron, The Province, December 19, 2009

In addition, Project Rebellion arrests revealed that gang lifestyle and activity can be generational. With the arrest of father and sons in the Sanghera group, it highlighted the possibility that parents do not necessarily turn a blind eye to gang activity, but rather encourage their children to join the gang lifestyle that they are already involved in or support their children when they start their own gangs.

7. **ARREST FOR PETTY CRIME:** Many youths who are recruited into gangs are challenged with committing smaller crimes to prove their allegiance to the group. Often, these youths are caught by store security personnel and the police become involved. This is an early warning that there may be more to it than simply not paying for a chocolate bar. There may have been previous thefts for which they were not caught.
8. **GANGS ALSO RECRUIT TEENAGE GIRLS:** Young males are not the only vulnerable group targeted by gangs. Teenage girls are recruited into gangs to do some of the "dirty work" such as holding guns or drugs, transporting illicit product from one place to another, and setting up rival gang members for retaliatory assaults or even to be killed. Female gang members are also victimized, having to endure sexual and physical assaults at the hands

of male gang members who consider young women “property.” They are also considered valid targets for murder in today’s gang culture.

There is help available for parents and/or children or youths who have questions about gang activity in their schools or want some advice on how to get out of a gang. A first point of contact for parents or youths is the school liaison officer at Vancouver high schools. It is understandable that this may not be a viable option for a youth who finds himself immersed in a gang. But if he wants help to get out or to simply talk about some options, the following list of resources may assist:

- To report information on gang activity, call 911 or if the preference is to remain anonymous, call CrimeStoppers at 1-800- 222- TIPS (or 8477).
- Email the Vancouver Police Department Youth Services Unit at youth.services@vpd.ca or call 311 and ask to speak to someone in the Youth Services Unit or the Gang Crime Unit. The operator will transfer the call.
- The Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General supports the “Youth against Violence Line”. This is a toll-free, 24/7 help line for young people to speak one-on-one, anonymously and in confidence with a support worker. The phone number for this service is 1-800-680-4264 or email at info@youthagainstviolenceline.com.

GANGS IN VANCOUVER

HISTORY

Though some form of gang has been present in Vancouver since the early 1900s, gangs have become far more prevalent and visible in the last few decades. Since 1985, gang activity has waxed and waned in Vancouver. Like the Asian gangs, many of the gangs that were active in the 1980s and 1990s were formed along ethnic lines, or were territory based, like the Persian Pride or the Indian Posse. The gangs were typically organized around the drug trade, and a number of gangs took turns controlling the drug trade in the Downtown Eastside (DTES). Violence was common as part of the turf wars that broke out over drug territory. Because of the high level of violence, membership was constantly changing and gangs were required to recruit large numbers of people to work for them. Intimidation was a common method of gaining cooperation from youth in particular.

In general, the history of gangs in Vancouver shows a great deal of repetition of similar themes. The desire for the gangs to make money through diverse criminal activities and increasing use of violence are typical for gangs regardless of the time period. Each era had very distinct types of gangs, with distinctive language, dress, naming styles and even the type of conflict. In the past, most of the tensions between gangs were related to territory and/or racial conflicts, though this shifted in the 1990s to focus more on the drug trade.

CURRENT SITUATION

The current picture of gangs in Vancouver is very different, from both a historical and international perspective. The majority of gangs are no longer formed and operating along ethnic lines, nor are gangs limiting their operations to a narrowly defined geographic area or to a particular crime type. The majority of both youth and adult gangs are largely multi-ethnic, operate in various jurisdictions, and are increasingly violent with better access to weapons, including firearms.

The gang membership criteria cited in most literature and used to identify gang members simply does not apply to many Vancouver gangs. Unlike gangs in the United States, wearing of specific coloured clothing, use of gestures or controlling of geographical areas through “tagging”

(graffiti) is rarely encountered in Vancouver. Vancouver gang members are not usually made up of individuals from impoverished families nor do they assume any ethnic affiliation, typically. Of course there are always exceptions to the rule: members of outlaw motorcycle gangs do identify themselves through the wearing of a club “uniform” as well, First Nations gangs tend to be based on ethnic lines. Many gang members sport tattoos; however, it is by no means a requirement of membership.

Some gangs are generally weighted in favour of a specific ethnic group; however, there are very few based exclusively on ethnic background. Some gangs, like the United Nations, seem to pride themselves on their ethnic diversity although apparently not every racial background is welcome. Gang membership is more likely made up of persons with historical associations such as attending a common high school, extended family ties or being in prison together. There are virtually no gangs who assert specific neighbourhoods as their “territory” and defend them as such. The typical gang member in Vancouver is a young male who comes from a middle-class home with access to material benefits and has the opportunity to pursue other life choices.

The most profound change to how gangs operate has been a growing awareness that, like legitimate business, successful gangs must diversify their business lines. Multiple criminal income streams are common. Dispelling the myth that gangs are driven by single crime types is critical because it affects how police resources are deployed and influences strategic direction. In the current state-of-play, gangs operating in and around the city of Vancouver have their collective fingers in innumerable criminal “pies.” Profitability is the key. Verified intelligence leaves no doubt criminal groups constantly conduct a risk-benefit analysis with respect to every crime they commit. VPD detectives have investigated multiple offences attributable to gangs operating in the region over the past year. These offences include, but are not limited to: debit card fraud, mortgage fraud, murder for hire, drug importing, exporting and trafficking, drug production, weapons trafficking, marihuana grow “rips,” large-scale organized thefts, extortion, loan sharking, robbery. Essentially, gangs presently under investigation will resort to any crime type they believe will generate income. If the crime under consideration is at high risk for police interdiction, they often direct junior or younger members of the group to commit the offence while still demanding a percentage of the profit.

CHALLENGES TO RESEARCHING GANGS

Compiling an accurate account of gang activity is difficult due to several factors.

UNDER-REPORTING

Under-reporting is a chronic problem largely due to the intimidation factor and fear of reprisal. The VPD commonly encounters individuals who have sustained severe injuries just short of fatal who refuse to cooperate and even actively attempt to avoid contact with the police. Examples abound where victims of extreme violence are dropped at the door of a hospital emergency room to live or die while their fellow gang members speed off.

In the VPD's experience, there are two primary reasons for underreporting violent assaults and other gang related crimes. The first is that some victims believe the criminal justice system can not effectively protect them in the event they choose to participate in a prosecution. This appears to be extraordinarily common. Secondly, some victims are participants in a criminal organization and accept whatever punishment they have experienced for a real or perceived transgression that has offended the leader of the group, or a punishment the leader of the group has sanctioned. Many victims simply regard this as an unpleasant by-product of the life they have chosen. The penalties imposed by the criminal organization can range from a minor assault up to and including life-altering injuries or death.

Similarly, monetary penalties are common with amounts ranging from a few hundred dollars to many thousands. This form of punishment is called "taxing" and if payments are not made then the amount "owed" increases exponentially and may be accompanied by serious assaults. Other intimidation techniques exist which inhibit reporting of crime. More sophisticated gangsters leverage threats against family members of the victim as a means of controlling or eliminating participation in the criminal justice system. Finally, the fear of reprisal, even if no evidence of a reprisal exists, discourages reporting. This is particularly true in situations where otherwise law abiding citizens become privy to what they perceive is a gang related crime (or are in possession of evidence which would assist in charging the perpetrator) and simply turn a blind eye or overtly refuse to cooperate with a police investigation.

GATHERING STATISTICAL DATA

The collection of meaningful statistical data regarding gang activity has unique challenges as the types of crimes and those involved in committing gang crimes are often not exclusive to the city of Vancouver. Unlike property-type crimes which are contained to city boundaries, gang crimes often span local, provincial and international boundaries which give rise to difficulty in gathering accurate statistics. What can be captured are the demographics post-arrest of successful police initiatives such as Project Rebellion. For example, of the 27 people arrested, all were male and in their 20s.

Some of the barriers to statistical accuracy come from the differences in the types of crimes captured in the various police records management systems, and also how these offences are reported. To overcome this challenge, most agencies maintain an effective working relationship with partner agencies in order to investigate, enforce and gather intelligence on gang members and their activities.

THE RESPONSE TO GANGS

The VPD response to gang crime can be defined on three levels, including proactive street enforcement, project based investigations focussing on high priority targets and intelligence gathering.

GANG CRIME UNIT

The GCU is involved in proactive enforcement directed towards gang members and individuals known to be predisposed to violence. This has always been a general priority of the VPD; however, with the creation of programs such as Bar Watch and Restaurant Watch, this active targeting has become much more focussed. Bar Watch has been very successful in denying venues for gangsters to congregate in an alcohol fuelled environment, particularly in a population-dense, volatile area such as the Entertainment District in Vancouver. The reasoning behind this is that gang members are very often apt to use violence, and in so doing, often pull uninvolved citizens into these violent incidents.

In Vancouver in recent history, examples such as the murders of Rachel Davis and Richard Hui at the Purple Onion Cabaret are still reminders of the damaging effects of the gangster mentality. Although Sharif was not a gang member, he was an active drug dealer in a crime group and he brought a gun to the bar with him that night. This is exactly the kind of criminal behaviour and reckless mentality that has the potential to reduce public safety and create tragedy.

When a bar or restaurant joins the Bar or Restaurant Watch program they delegate authority to the police to act on their behalf to eject gang members once they are identified, whether or not management is aware of their presence in the bar/restaurant. This serves to create a safe atmosphere both inside and outside the bars and restaurants, thus decreasing the likelihood of collateral injury to innocent bystanders.

Additionally, the VPD deploys members in a "Firearms Interdiction Team" (FIT) and part of this team's job is to seek out gang members active in the City's entertainment venues and eject them from bars/restaurants if the premises are part of Bar/Restaurant Watch. If the gang members are found in premises that are not members of Bar/Restaurant Watch, then the gang

members are identified utilizing the statutory authority granted under the BC Liquor Control and Licensing Act. Further enforcement action is undertaken if warranted as part of a zero tolerance approach to individuals who belong to gangs. Additionally, intelligence briefings are regularly held with patrol members to ensure they are aware of the gang members frequenting their patrol areas. All of these measures combine to create an environment which makes it very difficult for gang members to socialize in a public venue in the city of Vancouver.

Project-based investigations targeting gangs began with Rebellion and continue with Torrent. These investigations, while extraordinarily costly, are really the only effective tool to disrupt and disable gangs from continuing their criminal activities. Without a concentrated, multi-disciplined approach, enforcement efforts are often relegated to isolated arrests which have little effect on the group as a whole and do not impact the leadership. Project-based investigations, on the other hand, target the organization as a whole and aggressively investigate any and all serious offences in which they are involved. This holistic approach has proven to be very successful and, as described earlier, has resulted in the decimation of a group commonly referred to as the South Slope Gang.

Intelligence gathering is also a critical component in identifying the appropriate individuals for enforcement or identifying emerging trends. Members of the Criminal Intelligence Section (CIS) and Gangs/Drugs Section actively seek out sources of intelligence to develop targets and build cases.

YOUTH SERVICES UNIT

The Youth Services Unit (YSU) has undertaken a number of initiatives in an effort to monitor and alleviate the impact of youth gangs on the citizens of Vancouver. In addition to participating in various athletic activities with the more at-risk youth, members of the YSU have also prepared a presentation entitled "The Truth about Gangs." This presentation is directed at schools where the number of vulnerable youth who may be recruited into gangs is greater. Based on the feedback from teachers, students and parents, the presentation has been a huge success and the YSU receives countless requests to deliver it.

YSU members are also committed to gathering and disseminating information related to youth and their involvement in youth gangs. This information is shared with patrol members and with youth groups with the ultimate goal of preventing youths from joining gangs. It is a collaborative effort to ensure that multiple influences are at work to prevent youths from succumbing to the allure of the gang lifestyle.

CHALLENGES TO INVESTIGATIONS OF GANG MEMBERS

All police jurisdictions struggle with how to respond to gangs, as their increasing sophistication, secrecy, technological advancements, and willingness to use violence make it exceedingly challenging to gather evidence and secure convictions. Many common tactics are utilized by gang members to block investigations and thwart efforts by justice partners.

Intimidation

The use of intimidation is the most potent tool in the gang member's inventory and likely the most common factor in evading prosecution. Intimidation extends to criminal justice participants and is experienced by police and prosecutors. Many gang members have developed this skill into an art form. Intimidation can be as subtle as conducting minimal

In 2001, Ernie Froess, a Crown prosecutor working on the prosecution of Lising and Pires, was threatened with death in a downtown food court by John Virgil Punko, a member of the Angels' East End chapter. Punko was charged with uttering death threats and obstructing justice.

Froess testified in court that Punko approached him as he was eating in the Pacific Centre food court, kicked his chair, called him a "f---ing a--hole" and walked away.

Five minutes later, at the top of the mall escalator, he ran into Punko again -- who blocked his path and told him: "You better watch your f---ing back. You're f---ing dead."

Punko was convicted of obstructing justice in January 2002 and sentenced to eight months in jail and two years probation.

- Undercover operations: Police find that they are the subject of Angels' surveillance, Chad Skelton, Vancouver Sun, June 10, 2005

research with respect to the background of the victim and dropping hints backed up by some factual information relating to the victim's family members, where they live, and so on. VPD detectives have encountered situations where gang members have described the personal vehicles of police officers, including plate numbers and unique vehicle accessories, which suggest gang members have been conducting surveillance. Similarly, prosecutors have experienced intimidation where gang members (who are associates of accused persons) have

continually glared at them, milled about in close proximity and sometimes even issued direct, credible threats during the course of a trial. A few have even experienced suspicious occurrences at their residences. Safety plans and threat assessments are now a common fixture in gang related investigations and prosecutions. The most effective evidence suppression tool, however, remains the intimidation of witnesses and potential witnesses, whether they are gang associates or common citizens. Even a relatively low level of intimidation (well below the

threshold for criminal charges) can have a massive, disastrous effect on an investigation or prosecution.

Communication

Gang members have access to the latest communication devices which present a challenge to police on many levels. It is difficult, time consuming and expensive to try to keep up with constantly changing technology.

Jurisdiction

Gang members operate across municipal boundaries and are not bound to a specific geographical area. This presents organizational and logistical challenges. Different jurisdictions have widely varying resources directed towards gang enforcement. Many jurisdictions are content to have the regional integrated units provide a directed enforcement presence, while other jurisdictions supplement the integrated units with their own resources. Additionally, there are varying degrees of “buy in” by patrol or general duty members, depending on jurisdiction. The patchwork of resources such as surveillance, emergency response teams (ERT) and other law enforcement units also presents problems.

Diversification of Criminal Business Lines

Most criminal gangs still garner considerable financial support from the sale/import/export and production of drugs. Notwithstanding, there has been a profound shift in the past several years where criminal gangs are not limited to a single crime type. This becomes a challenge for investigators because investigative teams must be made up of criminal investigative specialists from a many disciplines. It is no longer acceptable or effective to engage a group of investigators who are solely oriented towards (for instance) drug enforcement – specialists in fraud, vice, serious violent crime, general investigations and others must also make up the investigative team.

Dangerousness

Many of the criminals investigated by police within the context of gangs are armed the majority of the time. This presents significant officer safety concerns, and members engaged in gang crime investigations must have a high level of tactical awareness and training. Regardless of the level of violence associated to the anticipated offence, ERT must play a role because experience

has shown the gang members committing the offence will be armed. This takes ERT away from other duties and often necessitates calling members out on overtime if ERT is shadowing surveillance outside the city of Vancouver (and so that a team is still available for “regular” ERT duties, such as barricaded gunmen). This can be extraordinarily expensive.

POLICE SUCCESSES WITH GANGS

The VPD Gang Crime Unit is intelligence-led and has moved towards project-based policing. As described earlier, Project Rebellion (2008/2009), led by the Major Crime Section (MCS), was a successful investigation targeting violent gang members associated to the South Slope area of Vancouver. Every member of the GCU was loaned to Project Rebellion, which ran from October 2008 to April 2009. Project Rebellion resulted in over 200 charges against 28 individuals.

Project Torrent (2009/2010) is also targeting the most violent gang members and their associates who live and/or operate in Vancouver. Project Torrent is a GCU-led investigation that includes VPD members from numerous sections such as the drug squad, strike force, patrol, ERT, financial crime, homicide, technical crime and robbery. Law enforcement agencies from across the Lower Mainland, such as the Delta and West Vancouver Police Departments; the Combined Forces Special Enforcement Unit (CFSEU); and the Langley, Surrey, Richmond and Burnaby RCMP Detachments; among others, have also provided resources.

Project Torrent began in April 2009 and is currently in the final stages of the investigation. To date, over 200 charges are planned against dozens of individuals and there are more charges anticipated. These charges will likely include various conspiracies, extortions, assaults, drug trafficking and a multitude of weapons offences. During Project Torrent, 45 kg of ecstasy, 170 kg of marihuana and 14 firearms have been seized thus far.

CONCLUSIONS

The VPD is committed to reducing violent crime in the city of Vancouver. A major contributor to violent crime has been gang activity. As a result, the VPD has committed extensive resources to combating gangs to reduce their negative impact on public safety. The VPD has developed innovative police tactics such as Bar/Restaurant Watch and the Firearms Interdiction Team, which together have contributed to decreasing gang-related incidents in the city of Vancouver. For example, the bellweather statistic of “shots fired” calls has decreased by 35% since 2007.

Suppressing gang violence is such a priority for the VPD that it forms an integral part of the 2008-2012 Strategic Plan and the 2010 Business Plan. Although many gang members have moved outside Vancouver, they still come into the city for entertainment, and “business” purposes. Thus, our enforcement must be relentless and ongoing, and our commitment stretches beyond our city limits, in collaboration with other law enforcement partners, when it is in the interest of effectively addressing the gang problem in Vancouver.

Coordination between agencies is imperative to the successful prosecution of gang members in the Lower Mainland. The VPD is committed to working with partner agencies and neighbouring jurisdictions to ensure that police stay ahead of crime groups. By sharing intelligence and seconding officers to regional enforcement agencies such as CFSEU and IGTF, where over 40 VPD officers are assigned, the VPD is able to complement enforcement strategies ensuring that the goal of preserving public safety is achieved.

In the past, fighting gang crime by targeting particular crime-types, such as drug trafficking, has not been the most effective use of police resources. The VPD has moved to a model of enforcement that targets crime groups that pose the greatest risk to the public. This approach takes a more holistic look at enforcement, which is necessary since gang crime groups have diversified along multiple crime types. Amassing evidence against an entire crime group for a wide range of offences has had greater impact because, if successful, it effectively dismantles the group, particularly since recent experience has demonstrated that most of the targets have been held in custody on their respective charges.

The downside to this type of enforcement is the cost. While it is highly effective, it is extremely expensive. It requires extensive personnel to staff such projects, and costs a significant amount of money to keep up with the changing technology that crime groups utilize. Fortunately, Project Rebellion and Torrent did receive Provincial funding assistance in recognition of the multijurisdictional nature of these investigations. The Government of BC recognized that criminals do not stop at city boundaries and to police this type of criminal behaviour would require significant financial support in order to be successful. The Provincial Government's leadership in providing significant funding to the VPD was crucial to the success of projects Rebellion and Torrent.

Regardless of the challenges, the VPD is committed to continuing the effort against gangs, has demonstrated its ability to be highly effective, and will continue to take aggressive action to improve public safety by reducing violent crime caused by gangs in Vancouver.

GETTING OUT

JONATHAN WONG [18 YEARS]

Jonathan Wong was born into a middle class family but had trouble at a very young age. At age four, when his parents separated, Jonathan and his sister went to live with his mother. Because of a custody dispute, Jonathan saw very little of his father. As a single woman, Jonathan's mother had problems balancing her personal life with raising her children. Before long, Jonathan and his sister were placed in foster care. Jonathan then lived in several different homes, and had to change elementary schools whenever he was moved.

The lack of stability soon took a toll on Jonathan. He was lacking acceptance and belonging at home and had very few positive role models in his life. At age 9, Jonathan began surrounding himself with peers who influenced him to take part in anti-social activities. Jonathan soon started getting into trouble at home and at school. At age 10, Jonathan began hanging around with youths who were much older than him. With little supervision at home, he was soon exposed to alcohol and drugs and his friends taught him how to be a drug dealer.

Jonathan saw these "friends" as his family and did everything they asked of him. By age 12, Jonathan was trafficking drugs and took part in many fights and assaults. Little did Jonathan know that his "friends" were actually part of a gang and he was being recruited. Once he was immersed in the gang, he watched several people he knew become addicted to drugs. He also knew several who were murdered.

When Jonathan turned 16, he started questioning his way of life. He began to realize that gang members only cared about themselves and he was being used to make money for them.

He began engaging in more positive activities including joining the Boys and Girls Club. He made a new set of friends and stopped hanging around his negative influences. His father was also back in his life and he was more accepting of positive influences at home and at school. He started playing sports such as rugby and wrestling. He excelled at rugby and was good enough to make the Canadian Under-18 National Team.

Around this time in Jonathan's life, members of the VPD Youth Services Unit (YSU) met him and were immediately impressed by his honesty about his past mistakes and his involvement with gangs. Since then, Jonathan has participated in a presentation by the YSU called "The Truth about Gangs" which aims to warn youth about the dangers of gangs. Jonathan is also assisting the "Odd Squad" with a documentary called "Gangs and Guns."



Jonathan recounts his real life experiences and tragedies, to connect with youth so they can avoid the way of life he was beginning to lead. Jonathan has turned these experiences into a positive message to youths: that anyone can achieve their goals in life if they believe in themselves. He gives freely of his own time to fulfill his commitment to this program.

Many kids have approached Jonathan and thanked him for being so honest about his experiences. Because of Jonathan, many kids have been convinced to avoid this way of life altogether. Even some of his elementary school teachers, who remembered Jonathan quite well, were fascinated by how he turned his life around. Jonathan went on to graduate from Killarney High School and was presented with a special award by members of the YSU. Jonathan now wants to be a police officer when he finishes college.



Even though Jonathan came from a dysfunctional family, lived in different foster homes and had several negative peer influences, he still beat the odds and got out of the gang life altogether. Unfortunately, many kids who get involved with gangs don't get out like Jonathan did, until it's too late. As an example, Jonathan's cousin Kyle Wong didn't make the same positive choices Jonathan did. Like Jonathan, Kyle was also recruited by gangs but instead of getting out, Kyle continued his involvement in gangs and was murdered at the age of 20.