

THE MEGAPHONE!



[busting **GANG** myths]

Promoting the voices of Manitoba's children & youth

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4 GANG MYTHS BUSTED



MYTH 1: YOUTH HAVE LOTS OF OPTIONS SO CHOOSING TO BE IN A GANG IS A POOR CHOICE.

REALITY:

In recent conversations with youth workers, they “rejected the simplistic notion that children and youth choose to join gangs, and instead [described that children and youth are often] doing the best they can in the face of structurally rooted troubles largely beyond their control, including poverty, family problems, difficulties in school, lack of employment opportunities, and racism and discrimination ... An individualized approach that situates gang involvement by youth as a ‘bad choice’ – that youth should simply ‘know better’ – entirely misses the mark. Rather, it may well be the case that these youth are making the ‘best choice’ they can under such adverse conditions.”¹

“These youth are making the best choice they can under such adverse conditions”

- Youth Worker



MYTH 2: LOCKING UP YOUTH INVOLVED IN GANGS IS THE BEST WAY TO FIX THE PROBLEM.

REALITY: Youth offending in Canada was examined by Nicholas Bala,² who emphasized the risk to communities in incarcerating greater numbers of young people. He noted that although **custody is an important part of the overall response to crime** in our communities, in seeking lasting change, it is important to understand that **incarcerating youth is expensive, it is rarely as effective as community-based programs, and placing children in custody may likely result in them becoming gang involved, or solidifying gang membership.** The vast majority of youth need to be supported in other ways to reduce their delinquent behaviours and increase community connectedness and cohesion.

Placing children in custody may **RESULT** in them becoming **gang involved**

“I was a good kid when I was younger, but then I got into some trouble with the law. As I got older I began to hang around with the wrong crowd, it almost got me hurt and even killed.”

- Youth in care writing about childhood

SOURCES:

1 Curran, A., Bowness, E., & Comack, E. (2010). Meeting the needs of youth: Perspectives from youth-serving agencies. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives-Manitoba: Winnipeg. (pp. ii and 13).; 2 Bala, N. (2011, November 4). Youth offending in Canada: Principles, policies & politics. Faculty of Law: Queen's University: Johnson-Shoyama Graduate School, University of Regina, 1-28.; 3 Side banner image Source: <http://orgs.usd.edu/awol/SocialIssues/YouthGangsViolence.html>; 4 True-False image Source: <http://www.medicareadvocacy.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/true-false.jpg>; 5 Totten, M. (2009b). Preventing Aboriginal youth gang involvement in Canada: A gendered approach. Aboriginal Policy Research Conference: Conference submission, pp.1-21.; 6 Brendtro, L., & Larson, S. (2004) as cited in Preston, J. P., Car-Stewart, S., & Northwest, C. (2009, p. 153). Aboriginal youth gangs: Preventative approaches. First Peoples Child & Family Review, 4(2), pp. 152-160.

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MYTH-TAKES

"I want to be **JUST LIKE** my big brother!"



MYTH 3: ONCE A YOUTH IS INVOLVED WITH A GANG IT'S TOO LATE, THEY ARE A LOST CAUSE.

REALITY: Most youth who become involved in gang activity, or who come into contact with the youth justice system can change! Adolescents are developing physically and emotionally throughout their teenage years and when they become involved in unhealthy peer groups or activities, **they can be supported and reclaimed by their communities**, given the right environments.

Larry Brendtro and Scott Larson (2004) argue that "...although many at-risk youth have endured traumatic experiences, young individuals are generally resilient and can lead productive and fulfilling lives, provided they are **surrounded by supportive leaders** who supply intrinsically meaningful ways to develop personal strength and positive values."⁶

MYTH 4: YOUTH JOIN GANGS BECAUSE THEY WANT A SENSE OF FAMILY.



REALITY: While this may be one reason, this is too restrictive a rationale. The choice to become a gang member is not a single decision. To compound the issue, many young people who eventually accept gang affiliation have survived significant trauma in their earliest and most vulnerable years of social and emotional development. As the child moves through adolescence, those unmet needs can seek less healthy, less safe methods of being met, making gang involvement an attractive option to get basic needs met.

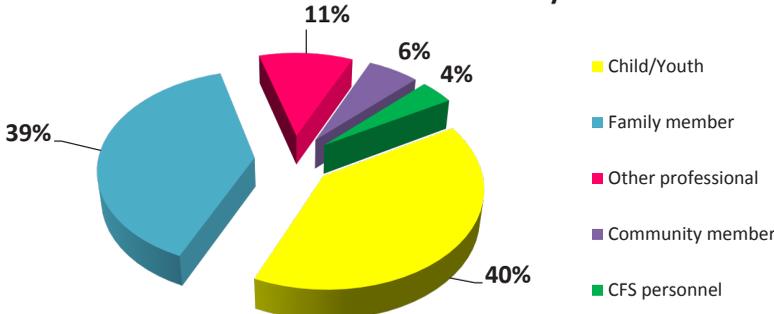
Gang involvement offers more than just a place to belong. Research shows that one of the many reasons people become gang involved is that it can offer income to support an individual and their family, especially in communities where poverty is a central concern.

Gang members, may seem unreachable, but in fact, they are wounded children trying to survive.⁵

39% of our referral base comes from parents, extended family, foster parents, and adoptive parents who contact the OCA on behalf of a child or youth.

Do YOU have questions or concerns?

Who Contacts the OCA for Advocacy Services?



"EXTRAORDINARY PEOPLE SURVIVE UNDER THE MOST TERRIBLE CIRCUMSTANCES AND THEY BECOME MORE EXTRAORDINARY BECAUSE OF IT."

- ROBERTSON DAVIES

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