



FROM WANNABES TO YOUTH OFFENDERS:

YOUTH GANGS

IN COUNTIES MANUKAU



RESEARCH REPORT



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research arose as part of a cross-sectoral response to concerns about youth gangs in Counties Manukau.

Senior officials from the following government agencies joined to address emerging issues and to formulate an evidence-based policy response:

- New Zealand Police
- Child, Youth and Family*
- Ministry of Justice
- Ministry of Education
- Ministry of Social Development.

A number of other agencies have also participated in this research, including:

- Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs
- Ministry of Youth Development
- Te Puni Kōkiri.

Jarrod Gilbert and Associate Professor Greg Newbold reviewed youth gang literature, which contributed to the historical and theoretical aspects of the research.

MSD would like to thank the individuals, community groups and social service agencies that have participated in this research.

* Child, Youth and Family merged with the Ministry of Social Development on 1 July 2006.

INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

Increased reports about escalating youth gang activity and increases in violent assaults led both government and community representatives to call for significant government intervention in Counties Manukau.

As part of a co-ordinated, cross-sectoral response, the Ministry of Social Development's Centre for Social Research and Evaluation was asked to research the issue of youth gangs. This report highlights the findings of this research.

There have been reports of youth gang-related problems in a number of areas in New Zealand. It is hoped that the research findings arising from a focus on Counties Manukau will provide an evidence base for policy development that will be applicable to other regions throughout New Zealand.

STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

The **first section** of this report outlines the methodology for the research, while the **second section** sets the context by looking at the demographic profile of Counties Manukau, and at definitions of youth gangs and the history of youth gangs in New Zealand.

The **third section** of the report looks specifically at youth gangs in Counties Manukau by:

- profiling youth gangs
- discussing whether the prevalence of youth gangs can be determined
- discussing factors that may contribute to youth gangs and youth delinquency.

This section also lists participants' suggested responses to the issues associated with youth gangs and youth delinquency.

The report ends with an addendum that focuses on a plan of action, which is a key part of government's longer-term response.

SECTION 1. METHODOLOGY

The aims of the project were to:

- understand the historical, social, economic and demographic features of Counties Manukau
 - understand the nature of youth gangs in Counties Manukau
 - assess possible factors that have contributed to the emergence of youth gangs
 - ascertain the extensiveness and impact of youth gangs
 - ascertain the number of services available in Counties Manukau that support youth and identify the factors that support, or hinder, optimal service provision
 - identify elements and features of intervention models that could be developed in Counties Manukau, with a specific focus on Mangere and Otara.
- Auckland government agency staff – including Police, Ministry of Education, Department of Child, Youth and Family Services, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Youth Development, Ministry of Social Development (including Work and Income and Family and Community Services)
 - current and former youth gang members
 - non-gang youth.

The research used a multi-method ethnographic approach that involved extensive engagement with:

- community-based participants – including social service agency staff, school principals, church ministers and community representatives with an interest or involvement in youth and youth gang activities
- While the focus of the research was on Otara and Mangere, research participants were drawn from South Auckland and Auckland City.
- The fieldwork began in early November 2005 and was completed at the end of March 2006.
- As an outcome of community consultation, it was decided that:
- youth would be defined as people aged between 10 and 23 years of age
 - the focus of the study would be on Otara and Mangere, as they had been identified as the “hotspots” of gang activity.

SECTION 2. SETTING THE CONTEXT

In an attempt to understand factors that may contribute to the emergence of youth gangs in Counties Manukau, a review of demographic, economic and historical factors was conducted. It was also important to review definitions pertaining to youth gangs.

Of note:

- Counties Manukau has a youthful population and a high proportion of Māori and Pacific peoples, and areas of high economic deprivation
- there is no agreed definition of youth gangs and many erroneously associate youth gangs with criminality
- youth gangs are not a new phenomenon, and youth gangs and criminal offending are not synonymous.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

The three most striking demographic features of Counties Manukau are:

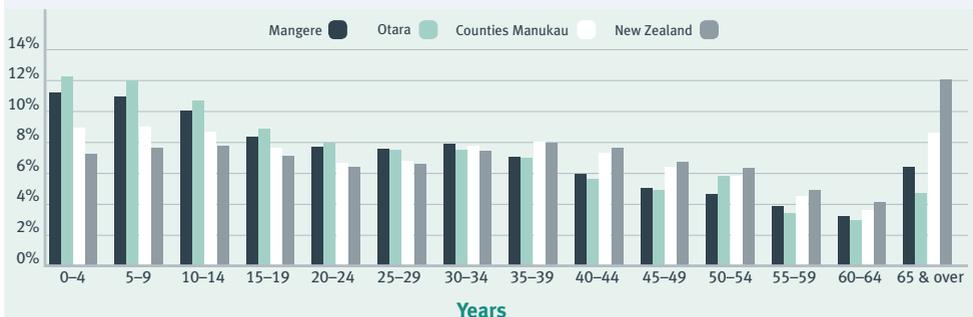
- a young age structure
- a high proportion of Māori and Pacific peoples
- areas of high economic deprivation.

Young population

In suburban Otara, 59% of the population were under the age of 30 in 2001, compared with 43% of the national population. Over a third of the population of Otara was aged 14 or younger in 2001, compared with just under a quarter of the national population.

Age Distributions for Selected Areas, 2001

Source: Census of Population and Dwellings 2001



SETTING THE CONTEXT

Ethnic composition

Six percent of the New Zealand population (231,800 people) identified with at least one Pacific ethnic group in the 2001 census, while 56% of people in Mangere and 69% of people in Otago identified themselves as Pacific people. In the 2001 census, 14% of the population identified as Māori, compared with approximately 20% of the population in Otago and Mangere.

Economic deprivation

In 2001, one out of every three people living in Manukau City lived in areas designated as decile 10 (the most deprived areas) by the New Zealand Deprivation Index. While the deprivation index indicates that some areas of Manukau City have low levels of socio-economic deprivation, notably in the eastern wards, the western and southern wards of Mangere, Manurewa, Otago and some parts of Papatoetoe have high deprivation scores: 94% of people in Otago and 78% of people in Mangere are living in some of New Zealand's most deprived areas (i.e. decile 9 and decile 10 areas).



SETTING THE CONTEXT

DEFINING YOUTH GANGS

There is no agreed definition of youth gangs and many definitions erroneously associate youth gangs with criminality.

Both gang literature and research participants related a variety of competing viewpoints of what constitutes a youth gang.

The majority of literature-based definitions include criminality as a central identifier. The problem with a criminal focus is that crime is characterised as the gang's defining feature and therefore gangs can be regarded as an issue of law and order only. Non-criminally focused definitions acknowledge that youth gangs form in a way that is similar to how other human associations form. These definitions acknowledge that crime may be part of a gang's activity, but seldom is it central to it, nor is crime necessarily the gang's primary reason for being. As such, those aligned with non-criminally focused definitions stress that youth gangs are not synonymous with crime and delinquency.

Given the lack of consensus around youth gang definitions and problems associated with defining gangs on the basis of criminal activity, this study employed the following working definition:

A group of youths, often from disadvantaged backgrounds, with a loose structure, a common identifier (colours, a name, hand signals etc), whose activities are not primarily criminal but involve (mostly) petty crimes, and who see themselves as a gang and are identified as such by others in the community (Gilbert, in preparation).

SETTING THE CONTEXT

HISTORY OF YOUTH GANGS

Youth gangs were first identified in New Zealand in the 1950s. Since then, the label has been applied to groups of youths with widely varying characteristics.

Historically, government has focused on New Zealand youth gangs as a result of public concern over what was perceived as rebellious adolescent behaviour.

	1950s	1960s
New Zealand Youth Gang Timeline	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Youth gangs arise as a new phenomenon• The Bodgies and the Widgies come to public attention• Denoted as highly informal groups of young people• Seen as rebellious teen behaviour – rock 'n' roll, alcohol and sexual activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The incidence of gangs remains relatively small• The American-based Hell's Angels gang influences gang development in New Zealand, providing a model for gang structure, leadership, rules, codes of conduct and mode of dress• Gangs mostly consist of Pākehā

SETTING THE CONTEXT

As the decades progressed, this concern focused more on criminal offending. More recently, a joint concern over criminal offending and the impact of United States-styled gang culture has been commonly reported.

From a review of the history of youth gangs, it can be noted that:

- youth gangs are not a new phenomenon
- youth gangs and criminal offending are not synonymous.

1970s

- Motorcycle gangs continue to grow
- Māori and Pacific gangs expand and gain notoriety as they are perceived to be increasingly violent
- This is occurring in depressed rural and urban settings
- Inter-gang struggles for territorial supremacy move gangs from loose collectives to territorially based groups
- In 1979, in Moerewa, a dispute between the Storm Troopers and Black Power escalates into a riot that results in police officers being injured

1980s

- Gang membership becomes more long-term and gangs are composed of adults rather than youth
- Gangs can no longer be regarded as youth gangs
- There is concern over crime associated with adult gangs

1990s

- With the popularity of the amphetamine trade, the criminal element of the established gangs becomes more pronounced
- Gangs tend to move from territorially based groups to more highly organised gangs
- In the early 1990s, Pākehā street gangs with neo-fascist and white power tendencies gain prominence
- An increase of Asian migrants since the 1980s has also brought Asian youth gangs to public attention

SECTION 3. YOUTH GANGS IN COUNTIES MANUKAU

In developing an understanding of youth gangs in Counties Manukau, the research profiled youth gangs, attempted to estimate the prevalence of youth gangs in Counties Manukau and investigated contributing factors to youth gang development and membership.

- Four classifications were made – Wannabes (not a youth gang), Territorial Gang, Unaffiliated Criminal Youth Gang and Affiliated Criminal Youth Gang.
- None of the classifications reflects a static sense of development, with members transitioning between and out of gangs, and gangs forming and disbanding.
- It is not possible to estimate the prevalence of youth gangs due to a lack of robust data currently gathered by government agencies.
- Many and varied factors were found to contribute to youth gang development and membership.

PROFILING YOUTH GANGS

Because youth gangs are often treated as a homogeneous unit, the research investigated whether:

- there are different types of youth gangs
- it is possible to distinguish between youth gang types.

The following classification resulted from this investigation. While Wannabes are not gangs per se, they are included here as they are often mistakenly labelled as youth gangs.

YOUTH GANGS IN COUNTIES MANUKAU

Youth Gang Classifications in Counties Manukau

WANNABES

- Erroneously categorised as gang members
- Highly informal
- May be some petty crime (associated with adolescent crime and not necessarily group activity)
- Similar dress code (such as bandanas)
- Shared signs (such as particular handshake)

TERRITORIAL GANG

- Slightly more organised
- Characterised by territorial boundaries
- Dabbling in opportunistic crime

UNAFFILIATED CRIMINAL YOUTH GANG

- Members are not under any adult gang
- Denoted by overt criminal intent and carries out criminal acts for their own benefit only

AFFILIATED CRIMINAL YOUTH GANG

- Gang is defined by a relationship to an adult gang
- Some biological relationships to an adult criminal gang
- Organised around criminal intent
- Often carries out criminal acts on behalf of adult gangs
- If apprehended, member(s) will generally be charged as minors

YOUTH GANGS IN COUNTIES MANUKAU

Wannabes

- Wannabes are often erroneously categorised as youth gang members and as part of criminal youth gangs. Rather they are best viewed as collectives of youth, a crew or simply as groups of friends.
- While some Wannabes may engage in some petty crime, it appears that there is no greater incidence of petty crime amongst Wannabes than any other adolescent group.
- Wannabes appear to be the majority of the population in question.

Territorial Gang

- Territorial Gang associations arise in terms of a sense of ownership and protection over an area. Of concern is the incidence of violence that ensues when another gang enters a particular territory.

Criminal Youth Gangs

- The two Criminal Youth Gang categorisations possess a high degree of organisation and, to some extent, are organised around criminal intent. The two categorisations differ in whether or not the gangs have a relationship with an adult gang.

- A relationship or allegiance with an adult gang endorses the lower-level gang's presence in its geographical area and reinforces its strength and presence.

YOUTH GANGS IN TRANSITION

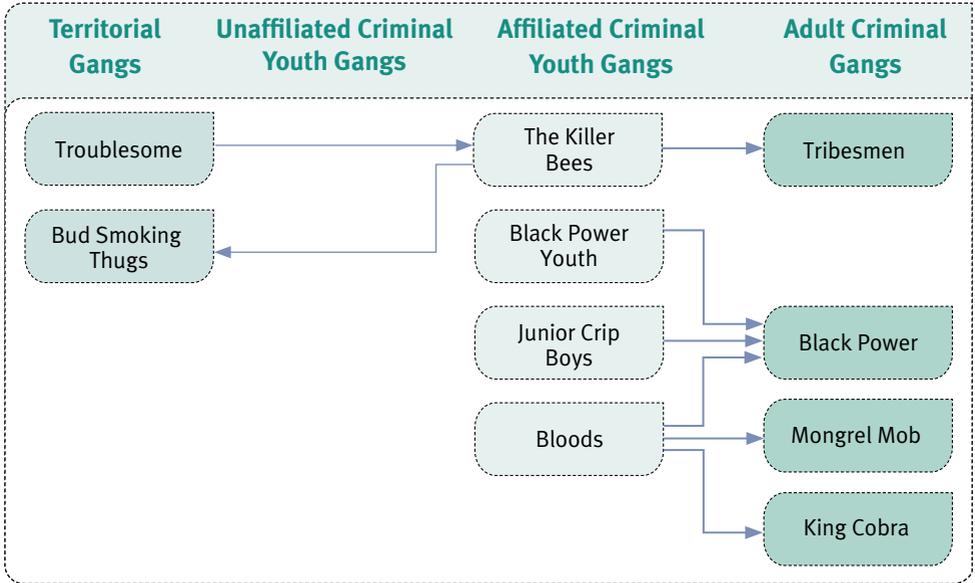
None of the classifications is static. Rather:

- it is common for Wannabe and Territorial groups to be transient and to cease to exist as quickly as they form
- transition within or to other gang types was frequently reported. While transition to gangs of higher levels of organisation and intent to engage in criminal activities is common, transition to less organised or less criminally focused gangs also occurs.

To demonstrate the issue of transition, the following table shows a snapshot in time (December 2005) of transitions from Territorial Gangs to some Adult Gangs in one area of Counties Manukau.

YOUTH GANGS IN COUNTIES MANUKAU

Youth Gang Transitions



Recruitment

A phenomenon of recruitment (prospecting) carried out by some adult gang chapters was confirmed by the research. It appears that there is a growing desire among some adult chapters to move away from historical criminal activities to employment and prosocial lifestyles and to provide positive environments for their children and grandchildren. Building upon this desire, the research identified a number of opportunities where agreements between adult gangs, government agencies and the community could be made for adult gang recruitment strategies to cease.

Barriers to leaving youth gangs

No significant barriers to exiting a gang were identified. Participants who had left gangs commonly referred to ongoing solidarity and spoke of gang members as their family.

Although no significant barriers were identified, exiting gang members reported that the gang of origin would often attempt to entice the individual back.

YOUTH GANGS IN COUNTIES MANUKAU

PREVALENCE OF YOUTH GANGS IS UNKNOWN

The New Zealand Police estimate that there are approximately 600 youth gang members in Counties Manukau, representing 73 youth gangs.

However, estimating prevalence is difficult because of a lack of robust data. It is also difficult to disaggregate youth crime from gang-related crime.

What can be determined is:

- there is a potential for increased violence in Counties Manukau arising from territorial disputes between gangs
- young people in economically deprived areas in Counties Manukau may view adult gang members as role models and see adult gang membership as a status to which to aspire.

Participants strongly suggested that it is erroneous to focus problem definitions solely around youth gangs, and that the various problems related to youth offending in Counties Manukau cannot be solved with a sole focus on youth gangs. A number of contributing factors provide a context for youth gang development but also impact on many non-gang youth in the area. As such, youth gangs need to be viewed as one outcome of wider social problems impacting on youth in Counties Manukau. Consequently, responses need to include prevention and interventions targeting first- and second-time and recidivist offenders.

YOUTH GANGS IN COUNTIES MANUKAU

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TO YOUTH GANGS AND YOUTH DELINQUENCY

The *Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa* (Ministry of Youth Development 2002) was used as a framework to organise the various contributing factors that emerged in the study. The Strategy focuses on the following main social environments: family/whānau, school, training and work, peers and community. The importance of the Strategy is that “strong connections to these environments can combine to form a supportive web that protects and fosters development” (Ministry of Youth Development 2002:18). Negative experiences in one environment can be reduced through quality support in others.

The following contributing factors to youth gang membership and youth delinquency were identified.

Economic/community

Economic deprivation

- Youth gangs, and youth delinquency in general, appear to be positively related to economic deprivation in Counties Manukau. This is consistent with existing research, which indicates that gangs are likely to flourish within depressed or disorganised communities.

Culture/community

Confusion over accepted parenting practices

- First- and second-generation Pacific immigrants were often described as having lost the supportive role of their village structure. The loss of the supportive role of the village coupled with confusion over accepted New Zealand parenting practices were highlighted as negatively impacting on child rearing. This was reported by the majority of Samoan participants. Similarly, Māori participants said that factors impacting on their parenting practices included the loss of wider whānau networks and supportive structures through rural-to-urban migration and historical disenfranchisement.

YOUTH GANGS IN COUNTIES MANUKAU

Family/whānau

Parental disengagement

- It was common for youth gang members to come from families with working parents, many of whom have multiple jobs. The majority of participants drew attention to extreme work–life imbalances experienced by parents who, in an effort to financially provide for their families, are under stress through long work hours and, as a result, are not able to engage with their children.

Stressors arising from financial commitments

- Financial pressures were found to negatively impact on families and to often lead to the use of and/or reliance on financial lending institutions to meet financial obligations. This can result in a cycle of debt, high interest rates and increased pressure within the home, which can contribute to parental stress and a lack of child–parent engagement.

Lack of engagement with services

- Lack of awareness, lack of confidence in service providers, pride, shame and suspicion of services were discussed as factors that prevent parents from engaging in services that could assist families in need of support (prevention) or at a stage of crisis (intervention).

Peers

The following motivational issues were raised for youth gang membership and youth involvement with delinquent activities.

Provision of a proxy family unit

- Gangs often provide youth with a proxy family unit that meets social needs and provides support and a social focal point.

Financial and material gain

- Gangs may provide a source of financial and material gain. This needs to be understood in the context of economic and environmental deprivation.

Alleviate boredom

- One of the biggest gaps in service and programme delivery is recreational activities that meet the needs and interests of children and youth. This issue is closely associated with poverty and was repeatedly reported as a key factor underlying child and youth delinquency and as an antecedent to youth gang involvement. A combination of boredom and a lack of activities creates a void in the lives of the population in question and this void is replaced by collective socialisation that can move towards criminal activity.

YOUTH GANGS IN COUNTIES MANUKAU

Status

- Gang membership and youth delinquency can provide a sense of status and recognition.

Protection

- Gangs provide a sense of protection. Wannabes described collective engagement as a response to school-based bullying. Territorial and Criminal Youth Gang members said that membership provided a sense of security at a street level (non-school).

Peer pressure

- Adult participants said there was a lack of adult mentors who can intervene to alleviate the pressure to engage in negative activities.

Excitement associated with crime

- Some youth gang participants referred to the excitement or “rush” associated with crime. This issue relates to a complex interweave of a lack of mentors, boredom and a lack of alternatives for enjoyment or recreation. Also discussed was the risk that criminal activity can become habitual.

Adult gang recruitment/prospecting

- Some adult gang chapters engage in active and passive recruitment. Young people’s desire for associations with adult gangs was seen as a motivational factor.

Schools

There was concern over the number of children and youth under 16 years of age who have been out of formal education for prolonged periods of time. Participants related a high degree of concern over these figures as there was a general belief that time out of the formal education system is strongly related to engagement in criminal activity. Anecdotal information from most agencies suggests that a significant number of children are not participating in school. There will be no reliable data available until the Ministry of Education introduces the electronic enrolment system over the next year. However, current data does indicate the rates for non-enrolled students over 2004–2005 are higher in Counties Manukau than nationally.

YOUTH GANGS IN COUNTIES MANUKAU

IMPROVING OUTCOMES FOR YOUTH

Developing strategies

Historically, strategies to reduce or eliminate youth gangs have fallen into three areas: prevention, intervention and suppression. While each approach has strengths, a single-faceted approach is of little use. Consequently, international studies strongly endorse a multi-systemic approach to youth gang prevention and intervention strategies.

Irving Spergel developed the Comprehensive Community-Wide Approach to Gang Prevention, Intervention, and Suppression – often called the Spergel Model (Spergel and Curry 1990). The model acknowledges the need for government, community-based agencies and schools to work together to develop targeted prevention and intervention strategies. The model has five components:

- organisational development and change
- community organisation
- social intervention
- suppression
- opportunities.

Following an explanation of each of Spergel's components, below, are suggestions that highlight prevention and intervention strategies that participants believed would enable the community and central and local government to respond to the issues associated with youth gangs and youth delinquency. This is not an exhaustive list of possible strategies.

Organisational development and change

This component includes changes to the way in which institutional policies and organisations function.

Suggestion: Local programme development

Participants suggested a move away from centrally developed programmes, policies and services to locally based community-government collaboration funding systems. Participants believed that such a move would go some way to ensuring that programme development meets the specific needs of the community.

Suggestion: Long-term funding

Participants suggested that there was a need to review fixed-term funding. Specifically, participants stated that there was a need to provide funding over longer periods of time so that community organisations have more financial certainty and are able to build capability.

YOUTH GANGS IN COUNTIES MANUKAU

Suggestion: Broader eligibility criteria

Participants suggested that funding-related eligibility criteria be reviewed. In particular, age- and individual-related criteria could be replaced with a whānau-oriented focus. For example, youth justice services are often funded for 14–17-year-old individuals. Three tiers that could benefit from an early intervention service are:

- the growing incidence of under-14-year-old offenders
- siblings who could benefit from early intervention
- the whānau system.

Suggestion: Infrastructural support

Participants suggested that community-based agencies need improved infrastructural support and assistance with sustainable programme development and programme implementation.

Suggestion: Interagency collaboration

Participants cited the need for increased levels of interagency collaboration at both community and regional levels. In particular, there is a need:

- to identify key points of intervention with at-risk young people and implement effective interagency collaboration around these points
- for ongoing commitment to interagency collaboration.

Suggestion: Increased resources

Participants raised concerns over the level of resources allocated to support youth justice processes. They suggested a review be undertaken of resource levels relating to the Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act 1989. Specifically, it was suggested that attention be given to the resourcing levels required to complete and follow up on plans.

Community organisation

This component includes local community organisation or neighbourhood mobilisation. Community organisation efforts are used to bring about change among groups and organisations in regard to community problems or social needs.

YOUTH GANGS IN COUNTIES MANUKAU

Suggestion: Community action

At a community level, participants felt that lack of community pride, a culture of poverty and lack of community action were closely interlinked. Community-based strategies are needed to encourage community action against detrimental issues impacting on the various communities.

Participants suggested there were a number of issues that needed to be addressed:

- gambling
- escalating debt
- under-age drinking
- tagging, inadequate rubbish collection and vandalism.

Social intervention

This component includes the development of services to address the various issues that are believed to contribute to youth gangs. Social intervention often includes youth workers, recreational and sporting activities, counselling and advocacy. Underpinning these strategies is the mentoring role carried out by youth workers.

Suggestion: Youth-specific responses

Participants unanimously suggested that responses to youth gangs need to be multi-systemic and simultaneously target non-offenders (primary prevention), first- and second-time offenders (secondary intervention) and recidivist offenders (tertiary intervention).

Participants suggested that community-based youth workers could provide sustainable activities that resonate with the needs and interests of children and young people, develop a prosocial sense of status and achievement, and alleviate peer pressure. Community-based youth workers could also refer young people to appropriate services.

Suggestion: Community participation

Participants suggested that there is a need to help parents participate in the community. The development of networks and community-based support would mean that parents would be less isolated and would be able to share parenting knowledge and practices.

Specific population groups that participants believed might benefit from improved community participation include:

- first-, second- and third-generation immigrant Pacific families
- Māori who have been removed from, or lost, the support of their extended family.

YOUTH GANGS IN COUNTIES MANUKAU

Suggestion: Parental engagement

Participants said that increased levels of parental engagement could be achieved through:

- implementing in-school child–parent education initiatives, such as literacy programmes, to reinforce parent–child interactions
- training parents and family members as sport coaches
- extending parenting education and support services to include parents of children aged 0–18 years
- national parenting education curricula for church ministers, as church ministers are often well placed to assist parents with parental education and support.

Suggestion: Increased service provision

A number of issues arose in regard to service provision.

Participants suggested that there is a need to increase the number of existing services and determine the best locations to provide services. This issue was raised because many residents were unable to travel the long distances required, throughout Auckland, to access services. Participants suggested that a review of service provision be undertaken in collaboration with community stakeholders.

Next, participants also suggested that appropriate promotional activities be developed to rectify the low uptake of services.

Suggestion: Stopping adult gang recruitment

Participants drew attention to a number of opportunities to develop agreements between the community, government and adult gangs for adult gangs to cease recruitment/prospecting of young people to engage in criminal activity.

Suppression

This component includes arrest, incarceration and supervision.

Suggestion: Police activity

Participants suggested that there is a need for:

- an increased police presence
- an emphasis on a community policing model
- further development of police strategies that focus on whānau rather than the individual.

YOUTH GANGS IN COUNTIES MANUKAU

Opportunities

This approach emphasises large-scale infusions of resources and includes jobs, job training and education.

Suggestion: Work opportunities

Participants suggested that youth delinquency can be addressed through work-focused activities that will contribute to long-term employability, eg apprenticeship schemes. Participants anticipated that this will require government-supported incentives for the development of local industry.

Participants suggested there is a need to make young people aware of available opportunities and to assist in channelling young people into those opportunities. Participants suggested that this could be achieved through:

- community- and school-based youth workers and school-based family liaison workers
- mentors to assist young people into apprenticeships and to support them throughout their training.

Participants acknowledged that these suggestions would require sustained funding for youth workers and family liaison workers in schools.

Suggestion: Assisting young people to remain in school

Strategies are needed to encourage ongoing engagement within the education system:

- targeting child and youth points of transition that may place the individual at risk of disengaging from the education system
- implementing ways to circumnavigate disengagement from the education system (such as better inclusion of broader learning approaches within educational delivery to meet a range of learning needs)
- reviewing the way that truancy services can best work in the various communities.

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ADDENDUM: ACTION PLAN DEVELOPMENT

In late 2005, the Chief Executives of the Ministries of Social Development, Justice and Education, the New Zealand Police, and the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services (now part of the Ministry of Social Development) began implementing a response to address the “youth gang situation” in Counties Manukau. A group of Auckland regional senior officials from these social service agencies was immediately established to lead the response. The Auckland Youth Support Network Group has recently expanded to include the Counties Manukau District Health Board.

Ministers agreed to a multi-faceted approach.

- Part one involved immediate action to address and de-escalate some of the youth gang activity in Counties Manukau. Policing was strengthened in the area, short-term funding was provided for extra services, and information was gathered to clarify needs and identify critical service gaps.
- Part two was research to understand the problem. This research is presented in this report.
- Part three was the development of a medium- to long-term response.

A key part of this longer-term response is a recently developed action plan. It sets out actions that we can undertake to improve outcomes for young people in Counties Manukau. This focus on youth outcomes is much broader than either

youth gangs or youth offending. This is because the research showed that youth gang activity is a symptom of deeper underlying factors that contribute to a range of negative outcomes for young people, only one of which is gang involvement. As such, there is a need to broaden “the problem” beyond that of youth gangs or youth offending to young people at risk of poor outcomes.

It is a priority for all of the government agencies involved to ensure the action plan is delivered and we will continue to work alongside communities throughout its implementation. Families, communities, local government and the private sector also have a crucial role to play. Going forward, we need to work together to identify other opportunities to improve outcomes for young people in Counties Manukau and in other areas where young people are struggling. To do this, we need to learn more about individual communities so that, together, we can tailor responses more effectively and make smarter resource allocation decisions. The research carried out in Counties Manukau has been an integral part of the response outlined in the action plan and will continue to shape our actions in the future.

The action plan is available on the Ministry of Social Development’s website www.msd.govt.nz



MINISTRY OF
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
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Published September 2006 by
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Website: www.msd.govt.nz

ISBN 0-478-29333-X