HARLEM
COMMUNITY
JUSTICE
CENTER

East Harlem Juvenile Gang Task Force

2011 Needs Assessment

Acknowledgements

The East Harlem Juvenile Gang Task Force was convened by the Harlem Community Justice Center in 2010 to conduct a community needs assessment and develop a strategic plan to address youth violence and the proliferation of juvenile gangs in East Harlem. The Task Force is comprised of representatives from a broad spectrum of government agencies, elected officials, local non-profit organizations, academics and faith-based organizations, including:

Boys and Girls Club of Harlem

Center for Court Innovation

Columbia University Center for Youth Violence Prevention

Harlem Children's Zone

Harlem Clergy and Community Leadership Coalition

Isaac Newton Middle School

Legal Aid Society's Adolescent Intervention Project

New York City Councilmember Melissa Mark-Viverito

New York City Department of Corrections

New York City Department of Education Gang Prevention & Intervention Unit

New York City Housing Authority

New York City Law Department

New York City Mayor's Office of the Criminal Justice Coordinator

New York City Police Department

New York City Department of Probation

New York County District Attorney's Office

New York State Office of Children and Family Services

Police Athletic League

Police Liaison Group/Schools United Network

Safe Horizon's Streetwork Project

Union Settlement Association

Contents

Executive Summary

Youth gangs are not a new phenomenon in East Harlem. New York's role as the immigrant gateway to America during the industrial revolution of the late 19th and early 20th centuries made the neighborhood a fertile ground for organized groups based on ethnic affiliations. However, over the last 40 years, the community as well as the nature, organization and impact of neighborhood youth gangs have undergone considerable changes.

In the last three years, youth gang activity, youth gun violence and youth crime have been increasing in East Harlem, even as overall city crime rates have declined. Community members, law enforcement, schools and service providers all report grave concerns about growing numbers of youth gangs, increased levels of youth violence, and the lack of comprehensive, collaborative approaches to prevention, intervention and suppression.

"…you know a problem exists when children 12 years old are involved in shootings."   *- New York City Police Officer*

In 2010, the Harlem Community Justice Center convened the Juvenile Gang Task Force to identify ways to reduce juvenile gang violence and involvement in East Harlem. For the purposes of the Task Force's work, a juvenile gang was defined as: *three or more youth between the ages of 11 and 21 that identify themselves by a common name, set of symbols and rules, as well as locations, and who engage in regular delinquent and criminal activity.*

This needs assessment and companion strategic plan are designed to provide a fuller understanding of the extent of juvenile gang activity in East Harlem, provide detailed accounts and perspectives from area youth, parents, service providers and police, and offer a blueprint to reduce juvenile gang involvement and youth violence going forward.

Key Findings

Youth gang-related violence appears to be on the rise in East Harlem.

- Between 2007 and 2009, the New York City Police Department (NYPD) reported an increase in identified youth gangs in Upper Manhattan from 10 gangs and 150 members to 29 gangs and 1000 members.

- According to the NYPD, gang-involved youths were responsible for 29 percent (7 of 24) of all gun-related homicides in upper Manhattan in 2009, and 30 percent (31 of 102) of non-fatal shootings.

- Between 2009 and 2010, arrest rates in East Harlem for index crimes rose-- murder was up 63 percent, robbery was up 20 percent, Organized Crime Control Bureau narcotics arrests were up 21 percent, and gang arrests were up 134 percent.

- In 2009, youths under the age of eighteen accounted for 41 percent of all robbery arrests in upper Manhattan.

"The physical violence leads to fear and fear leads to gun shots… I think more kids are shot out of fear."   *– East Harlem resident*

Youth gangs in East Harlem tend not to be affiliated with nationally recognized groups, are primarily organized around geography and increasingly rely on social media to facilitate activities.

- Although the juvenile gangs in East Harlem have similarities with more well-known gangs -- participation in violence, tagging, and confrontations among groups over turf-- East Harlem gang membership is generally younger and more fluid than larger, more established gangs.

- Juvenile gangs tend to cluster within specific areas in the community, particularly public housing projects, which are disproportionately affected by violence.

- Social media is increasingly being used to document rivalries among youth gang members and to mobilize members, fueling violence and expanding the numbers of people involved in confrontations.

"…youth (gangs) have made their blocks territorial and therefore have conflicts with other youths whenever they venture off the block they have claimed."   *-New York City Police Officer*

East Harlem young people confront multiple significant risk factors that may leave them more vulnerable to gang involvement.

- Youths in East Harlem are exposed to multiple risk factors that increase their likelihood of gang involvement, including family poverty, availability of drugs and firearms in the neighborhood, and high rates of juvenile justice system involvement.
- Low academic achievement and poor school performance are risk factors for gang involvement. East Harlem schools have among the highest rates of suspensions and chronic absenteeism, clear warning signs for school failure and serious delinquency, including gang involvement.
- The majority of youth survey respondents (63 percent) felt that youth gangs are a "very serious problem" in the neighborhood. Respondents said that young people join gangs for a variety of reasons: because family members or friends are in a gang (51 percent); to get more respect from others (51 percent); to get protection from others (49 percent); and to feel they belong to something (46 percent). The majority of youth survey respondents (53 percent) reported that they knew of gang members in their school.

"Programs are there, but people don't know they are there... that's the problem, getting these kids into existing programs." *-East Harlem Resident*

Law enforcement, schools, civic groups and social service agencies confront obstacles to identifying, understanding and therefore preventing gang activity on an individual and community-wide basis.

- Intervention partners experience considerable challenges identifying and tracking gangs, including lack of agreement regarding the definition of a "gang", community mistrust of law enforcement, and inadequate information sharing among stakeholders.
- Law enforcement organizations are often precluded from sharing individual and aggregate aspects of gang activity and criminality with the community due to investigation-related confidentiality constraints.
- Though programs for young people exist in the community, the absence of effective communication and established referral procedures among providers, schools, law enforcement and civic groups often thwarts participation among at-risk young people.

"It's a never ending cycle of violence and we have no time for healing."

- *East Harlem Resident*

Community Profile: East Harlem

Demographics

Once primarily Italian, East Harlem (also known as "El Barrio) is now predominantly Puerto Rican, Mexican and African –American, although demographics are in flux as newer and more affluent residents move in.[1]

East Harlem -- New York City Community District 11 -- stretches from 96th Street to 126th Street from Fifth Avenue to the East River in Manhattan. In 2008, according to the Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, Inc., there were 126,788 people living in the community. Forty-nine percent of local residents are of Hispanic origin, 33 percent Black/African-American, 12 percent White, 5 percent Asian and 1 percent are "other."[2] Additionally, 24 percent are reported to be foreign born.[3] The population of East Harlem is younger than most communities in New York City, 30 percent of residents being under the age of nineteen.[4]

Poverty and Unemployment

Despite general improvement in the overall quality of life since the early 1990s, East Harlem continues to experience higher rates of crime, poverty, unemployment and educational failure compared to the rest of the city. In East Harlem, 25 percent of children live below the poverty line, compared to 20 percent of all Manhattan children.[5] Data from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's Socioeconomic Mapping and Resource Topography (SMART) system indicates that East Harlem is one of the nation's poorest communities. According to Census data in SMART, East Harlem is rated 10 out of 10 on the community disadvantage index. This means East Harlem is poorer than 100 percent of communities nationally.[6] In 2009, in the midst of a national recession, the unemployment rate for greater Harlem and Washington Heights, including East Harlem, was 13.6 percent, compared to 9.1 percent for Manhattan and

---

1 William, Timothy and Vega, Tanzina. (January 21, 2007). As East Harlem Develops, Its Accent starts to Change. New York Times. See: http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/21/nyregion/21east.html.

2 Keep Track Online (2010), Citizens Committee for Children NYC. (East Harlem Profile). See: http://www.cccnewyork.org/aboutkt.html.

3 Ibid.

4 2010 NYC Community District Profiles East Harlem, Statement of District Needs. Page: 274. See: http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/pub/mnneeds_2010.pdf.

5 Ibid.

6 OJJDP Socioeconomic Mapping and Resource Topography (SMART) system analysis of 26 census tracts comprising East Harlem filtered for "indexes."

10.1 percent for all of New York.[7] The unemployment rate for African-American and Hispanic males in upper Manhattan was 22 and 20 percent respectively, nearly three times as high as the rate for white males.[8]

Housing
East Harlem is home to the largest concentration of low-income public housing in the country. According to the New York City Housing Authority, there are 16 public housing developments in the community with more than sixteen thousand units. Twenty-eight percent of all public housing households in East Harlem are headed by a single female. The effects of recession and neighborhood gentrification have been considerable. Twenty-five percent of East Harlem residents spent one half or more of their income on rent according to a 2008 report.[9]

Education
According to a 2011 study by the New York City Department of Education (DOE), 20 percent of all District 4 (East Harlem) students in grades K-12 were chronically absent from school.[10] From 1999 to 2009, the DOE reported that citywide school suspensions increased by 66 percent, with African-American students accounting for 53 percent of all suspensions and Hispanic students accounting for 35 percent.[11] District 4 elementary and middle schools had a total of 1,592 suspensions in the 2008-2009 school year.[12]

Health
Residents of East Harlem suffer from an alarmingly high prevalence of serious health problems. According to the New York City Administration for Children's Services, the 2010 rate of children under 17 with indicated cases of child abuse and/or neglect was 31.2 per 1,000 children, almost twice the rate of 15.8 per 1,000 for the rest of Manhattan. [13] The New York City

7 New York City in the Great Recession Divergent Fates by Neighborhoods and Race and Ethnicity. Fiscal Police Institute Brief (December 2009). See: http://www.fiscalpolicy.org/FPI_NeighborhoodUnemployment_NYC.pdf.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid, Keeping Track Online (2010).

10 Data provided by Santiago Taveras, Deputy Chancellor for Community Engagement, New York City Department of Education, March 8, 2011..

11 Michael Mondelkeern, As School Suspensions Soar, Many Seek A Different Approach, April 2011, Gotham Gazette. http://www.gothamgazette.com/article/education/20110401/6/3503.

12 Data provided by Santiago Taveras, Deputy Chancellor for Community Engagement, New York City Department of Education, March 8, 2011..

13 New York City Administration for Children's Services Community Snapshot CD 11 East Harlem 2010. See: http://www.nyc.gov/html/acs/html/statistics/statistics_cd_snapshot.shtml.

Department of Health and Mental Hygiene ranks East Harlem among the neighborhoods with the highest rates of asthma in New York City.[14] Furthermore, the Health Department indicates that between 19 and 24 percent of East Harlem residents are obese. The death rate in East Harlem in 2003-2004 was the second highest in the city and 50 percent higher than the overall death rate for Manhattan and New York City.[15]

Violence, Crime and Incarceration
Though crime rates have dropped precipitously in New York City and East Harlem over the last 20 years, East Harlem still struggles with higher rates of violence, crime and incarceration than other Manhattan neighborhoods.

According to information provided by the New York City Department of Juvenile Justice, in 2008, Manhattan Community Districts 10 and 11, representing Harlem and East Harlem, had the 3rd and 7th highest rates of detention for delinquent youth among all New York City neighborhoods.[16] In 2009, the New York State Office of Children and Family Services indicated that Community District 11 had the fourth highest rate state-wide of both delinquency filings in Family Court, and in the number of admissions to juvenile state placement.[17] In November 2010, a total of 338 Manhattan youths were under supervision by the NYC Department of Probation. Of those, 179 (54 percent) were from Harlem neighborhoods.[18]

Locally, over 2,200 formerly incarcerated persons on parole – or roughly half the total for the entire borough of Manhattan – are assigned to the bureaus serving Upper Manhattan, including East Harlem, each year.[19] East Harlem has among the highest concentrations of male ex-offenders in the state. The Justice Mapping Center identified a seven block corridor in East Harlem where 1 in 20 males have been to prison, unemployment was 15 percent, 40 percent of

---

14 NYC Department of Health Community Health Survey Atlas 2009. See: http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/downloads/pdf/epi/nyc_commhealth_atlas09.pdf.

15 New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Community Health Profiles 2008: http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/downloads/pdf/data/2006chp-303.pdf.

16 New York City Department of Juvenile Justice, 2008 Community District Detention Rate report.

17 Information obtained from the New York State Office of Children and Family Services.

18 Information obtained from New York City Department of Probation.

19 Data from the New York State Division of Parole for years 2003-2007 covering the Parole Bureaus II, III, and IV. These bureaus cover all NYPD Manhattan North Precincts, including some located outside of the neighborhoods that are the subject of this report. However, we suspect that the vast majority of parolees live in Greater Harlem, Inwood and Washington Heights. This figure does not include sex offenders on parole and certain parolees with mental health designations, both classes of cases are monitored by a city-wide parole bureau.

residents lived in poverty, and the state spent 3.5 million dollars annually to incarcerate residents.[20]

The effects of parental incarceration on children are profound. Problems associated with the prolific incarceration rate of parents include increased drug use, and psychological and developmental impairments.[21] In New York State prisons, 73 percent of women and 58 percent of men are parents.[22] Some research suggests that between one-third and one-half of youth in detention or placement have a parent who has been incarcerated. [23] Black children experience higher rates of parental incarceration with some research showing a 50 percent parental incarceration rate for black children born in 1990 to a high school drop-out father.[24] One report even found a 22 percent rate of gang involvement for children with an incarcerated parent.[25]

20 Convict Alley in Harlem Nabe" (Sunday, March 17, 2007) New York Daily News. The article cites research conducted by the Justice Mapping Center examining a seven block area from 119th Street to 126th Street, between Third and Lexington Avenues in East Harlem. See: http://www.justicemapping.org/archive/23/convict-alley-in-harlem-nabe/

21 Ibid.

22 Women in Prison Project Fact Sheet. Correctional Association of New York. See:

http://www.correctionalassociation.org/publications/download/wipp/factsheets/Families_Fact_Sheet_2009_FINAL.pdf .

23 Drucker, Ernest (2011-Forthcoming) A Plague of Prisons: The Epidemiology of Mass incarceration in America. The New Press. Page 104.

24 Ibid. Page 156.

25 Ibid, Page 104. Citing research conducted by Denise Johnston at the Pacific OAKS Center for Children with incarcerated Parents in Pasadena California, "Children of Offenders."

Why Young People Join Gangs

"Most kids join gangs because they want to have more power… [and] to get things that they want … "People are in gangs to be safe."

- East Harlem resident

The high prevalence of risk factors in East Harlem contributes significantly to the presence of gangs and gang violence in the neighborhood. East Harlem parents and residents are keenly aware of the risks and the reasons for gang involvement. Research clearly indicates that high rates of personal, familial, peer-related and community-based problems and stressors leave youth more vulnerable to delinquency, crime and gang activity. Research also shows that the more risk factors experienced by a young person, the more likely the youth may become gang involved.[26]

Needs assessment survey results indicate a host of reasons that local youth might join gangs. Fifty-one percent of survey respondents said young people join gangs because family members or friends are in a gang. Fifty-one percent said that youths joined gangs to get more respect from their peers. Forty-nine percent said young people joined gangs to get protection from others and 46 percent said that youths participate in gangs to feel that they belong to something. Fifty-three percent of the youths who completed the same survey reported that they knew of gang members in their school.

The following chart, derived from the National Gang Center's Review of Risk Factors for Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Gang Involvement outlines specific risk factors in five domains for 11 to 17 year olds that increase the likelihood for delinquency and criminality.

---

26 National Gang Center, Review of Risk Factors for Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Gang Involvement, August 3, 2011. http://www.national gang center.gov/spt/risk-factors/research-review-criteria.

Individual	Family
- Antisocial/delinquent beliefs - Early dating/sexual activity/parenthood - Life stressors such as poverty or illness - Makes excuses for delinquent behavior - Mental health problems - Physical violence/ aggression - Violent victimization	- Broken home/changes in caretaker - Delinquent/gang-involved siblings - Family poverty/low family social economic status - Low attachment to child/adolescent - Low parent education - Poor parental supervision
School	**Community**
- Low academic aspirations - Low math achievement test scores (males) - Low parent college expectations for child - Low school attachment /bonding/motivation/ commitment to school - Poor school attitude/performance and academic failure - Poorly organized and functioning schools/ inadequate school climate/negative labeling by teachers	- Availability of drugs in the neighborhood - Availability of firearms - Economic deprivation/poverty/residence in a disadvantaged neighborhood - High-crime neighborhood - Community disorganization - Feeling unsafe in the neighborhood - Low neighborhood attachment - Neighborhood youth in trouble
Peer	
- Association with antisocial/aggressive/delinquent peers: high peer delinquency - Association with gang-involved peers/relatives	

Table 1 - Risk Factors for Delinquency and Gang Involvement – National Gang Center

Efforts that increase protective factors associated with youth success -- positive youth development programs, educational initiatives, youth employment projects, etc. -- are important tools for reducing violence and eliminating the need for gang membership in East Harlem.

Juvenile Gangs in East Harlem

"…*youth on youth crime is the biggest threat*."   **- *East Harlem parent***

East Harlem juvenile gangs that are the focus of this report do not typically identify themselves as members of large, nationally affiliated gangs like the Bloods or Crips. Instead, East Harlem juvenile gang members are more likely to be affiliated with geographically-based crews that cluster in specific areas in the community, particularly public housing projects. Most juvenile gangs have a dress code that typically emphasizes specific popular name brands of clothing (for example, Polo, Nautica or Rugby shirts) or specific colors, tattoos, jewelry, or styles.

The New York City Police Department (NYPD) reports that from 2007 to 2010, the number of known juvenile gangs in Upper Manhattan increased from 10 groups with 150 members to 29 groups involving up to 1,000 members. In 2009, the NYPD estimated that in Upper Manhattan, juvenile gang members were responsible for 29 percent (7 of 24) of all gun-related homicides and 30 percent (31 of 102) of non-fatal shootings. The police also report that in 2008 and 2009, 43 percent of all robbery arrests in Upper Manhattan involved persons under the age of 18. The following NYPD map shows the location of 29 different youth gangs or "crews" in Upper Manhattan, each identified by an acronym.

Table 2 - NYPD 2010 Map of Youth Gangs or "Crews" in Upper Manhattan

The New York City Police Departments, 23rd and 25th Precincts, and Public Service Area 5, which is responsible for public housing developments, together cover the East Harlem community. The NYPD reports that East Harlem alone is home to at least 13 active juvenile gangs, most of which are geographically organized and identify themselves by three letter acronyms. Seven of the 13 gangs are in the 23rd Precinct; six are in the 25th Precinct. Juvenile gang members are predominantly African-American and Latino and native born, although there are a small but growing number of recent gangs comprised of immigrants from Mexico and Central America.

16
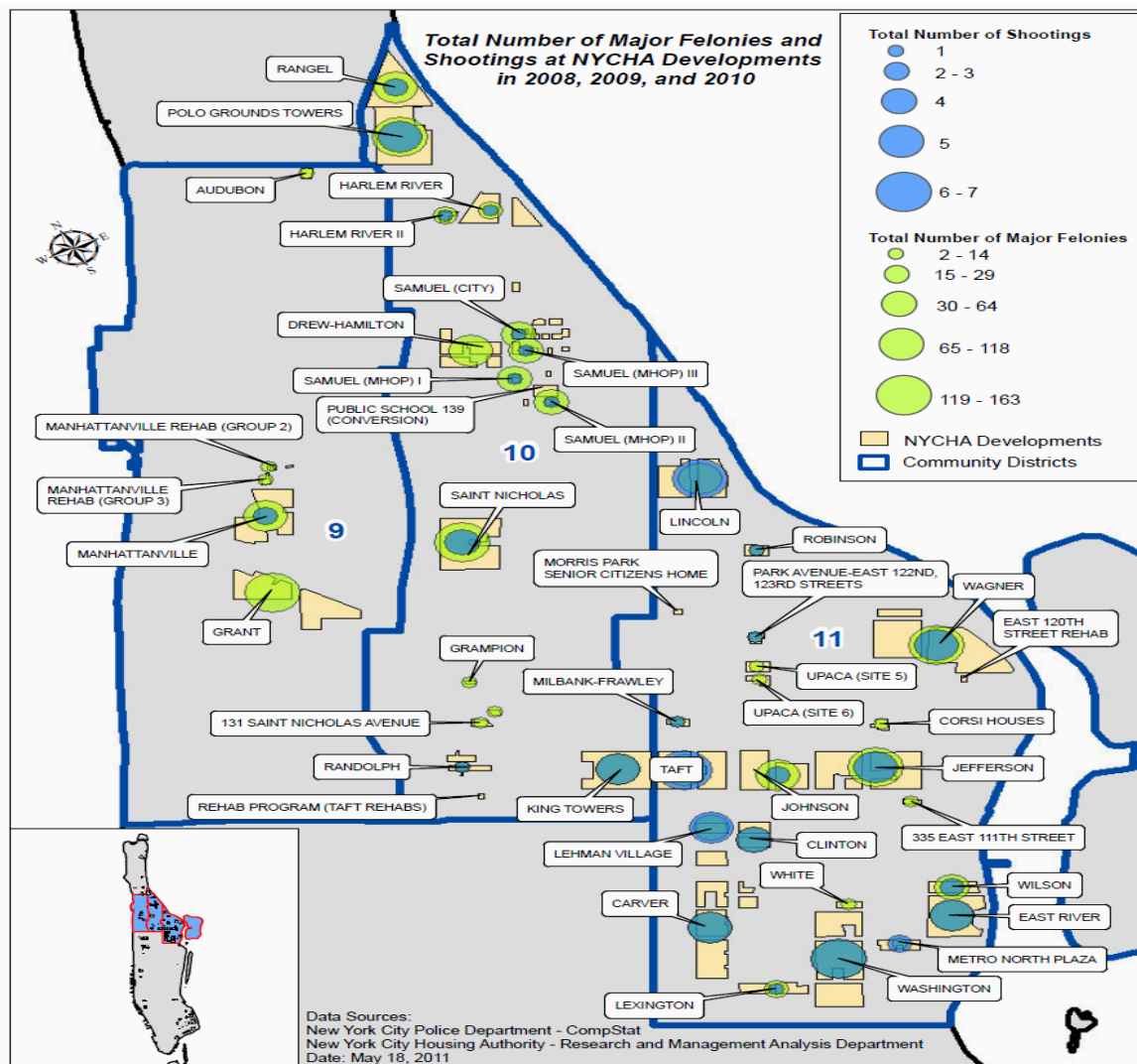
Table 3 - NYPD 2011 Map of NYCHA Felonies and Major Shootings

Geography plays a critical role in the formation of juvenile gangs. New York City Housing Authority ("NYCHA") developments are often a primary location for violent crime involving youth. Between 2009 and 2010, the rate of index crimes committed on NYCHA properties in greater Harlem increased at twice the citywide rate for all NYCHA properties.[27] The number of shootings in Harlem's public housing developments almost doubled from twenty-two in 2008 to

27 Data provided by NYCHA 2011.

forty in 2010. As shown in the map below, most of the developments with the highest rate of shootings are in East Harlem.[28]

…there are massive amounts of kids between the ages of twelve to nineteen on a particular street corner fighting."   *-New York City Police Officer*

Currently, 11 of the 13 gangs in East Harlem have ongoing overt rivalries and conflicts, or "beefs". The most active gang rivalries are between AIO (Air It Out) and TMG (Tru Money Gang) and Fetti Boys, CMB (Cash Money Brothers) and WBz (WingBoyz). A list of these gangs and their location is provided in Appendix E. Beyond the individual groups described above, there appear to be two "super groups" of juvenile gangs in East Harlem: the "Young Bosses" and "Young Gunnaz." New members are often recruited while in the city's jail system.

Like their counterparts in other parts of the county, juvenile gangs in East Harlem are routinely involved in graffiti or "tagging." Phillips (1999)[29] and Ley and Cybriwsky (1974)[30] document four classic types of gang graffiti: *hitting up* and *roll calls* (to affirm of one's gang and gang membership), *crossing out* (to slander other gangs in the same gang system), and *RIPs* (to memorialize deceased members).

Gang graffiti can be seen in hundreds of locations throughout the East Harlem community. East Harlem gang graffiti typically consist of simple "tags" of the gang's three letter acronyms. These tags can be seen on building walls, in subway stations, on school bags and on street posts. Tags often include a space and then a "K" after the three letter name (the "K" stands for "killer"). Graffiti also documents current and past rivalries. A dispute between gangs is often signified by one gang's three letter name crossed out with another gang's three letter name below it.

---

28 Yeebo, Yepoka. (September 23, 2010). Two Kids Injured in East Harlem Shooting, Police Say. DNAinfo.com. See: http://www.dnainfo.com/20100923/harlem/two-kids-injured-east-harlem-shooting-police-say.

29 Phillips, Susan A. 1999. *Wallbangin': Graffiti and Gangs in L.A.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

30 Ley, David and Roman Cybriwsky. 1974. "Urban Graffiti as Territorial Markers." Annals of the Association of American Geographers 64: 491-505.

Table 4 Sample East Harlem Gang Tag

On social networking sites, these "graffiti" genres take the form of text-based posts or photographs layered with text and symbols. In many ways, "tagging" a Facebook "wall" is easier than writing graffiti on the street where quality-of-life policing strategies and anti-graffiti programs disrupt such illegal activity.

Teenagers in youth gangs also use social media to "talk trash" about rival individuals or groups. This potentially incendiary talk—which is often most provocative when accompanied by multimedia material like photographs or videos—may provoke new conflicts or be leveraged as a fresh reason for longstanding rivals to fight. Cell phone cameras are sometimes used to capture on-the-street intimidation and violence which become widely disseminated in a short period of time.   Gang hand signs and/or handshakes are identifiers as well. Each youth gang has its own hand sign that distinguishes its group association.

Rivalries and conflicts between neighborhood-based groups play out in the street, on the corners and online. Gangs spend considerable time defending turf. East Harlem residents routinely discuss the risks young people face when crossing gang turf boundaries to go to school, run an errand or visit family member in another housing development. A recent survey on

neighborhood conditions showed that 37 percent of youth surveyed avoid certain areas of their neighborhood due to gang-related concerns and 22 percent of youth surveyed indicated that they carry a weapon for protection.

Given the frequency with which young people carry weapons and the proliferation of social media to spur gang related communication, the rise in gang-related violence is perhaps not surprising. Social media can be used to rapidly mobilize numerous, sometimes contentious groups from different Harlem neighborhoods and even other boroughs, to a particular street or party. Weekend teen parties in unsupervised apartment units or rented event spaces can become sites of violence as party addresses circulate on social media networks and rival groups exploit this information to catch one another on the way to, inside, or leaving these events. According to police accounts, parties widely "tweeted" by teenagers factored into acts of violence involving youth.[31]

"There has been a rash of shootings… everyone is just pulling out a gun to solve conflicts."   *-Public Housing Service Provider*

Challenges in Collaborating to Identify and Prevent Gangs

Gathering information on gang activity is challenging; the lack of raw data has impeded state and local efforts to plan and coordinate an integrated approach to gang prevention and intervention. Community mistrust of law enforcement may also contribute to difficulty gathering intelligence.

A basic challenge is the considerable debate over the definition of a "gang." The National Crime Information Center's definition of a gang is "*an ongoing organization, association, or group of three or more persons that have common interest and/or activity characterized by the*

---

31 This phenomenon was reported by the police who have responded to "flash mob" or "house parties" organized on Facebook or other social media as well as by Task Force member Jeffery Lane, a PhD candidate in Sociology at Princeton University, who is conducting an ethnographic analysis of digital technology and face-to-face interactions among Harlem youth that contribute to violence.

commission of or involvement in a pattern of criminal or delinquent conduct."[32] New York City Law Enforcement defines a gang as "a *group of persons, with a formal or informal structure that includes designated leaders and members, that engages in or is suspected of engaging in unlawful conduct.*" Though both definitions connect gang involvement to actual delinquent acts and crime, New York City expands its criteria to include groups that are simply suspected of criminality, considerably expanding the number of groups that might be defined as a gang. There is also some disagreement about the requisite number of members, the amount of formal structure and the presence or absence of designated leadership that might merit a "gang" definition for a particular group or crew. The disagreement over the definition of "gang" has confounded attempts to create a clear picture of not only the gang presence in communities but also the level of violence attributed to these groups.

 The ability of law enforcement to identify and prosecute youth gang activity is another obstacle. While gangs are often prosecuted under state and federal racketeering laws using a theory of "criminal enterprise," it is unclear that many East Harlem youth gangs would constitute such an enterprise under the law. The fluid and nuanced nature of these gangs may exempt them from the purview of the state's racketeering statute which demands that the group of persons forming the "enterprise" have an "ascertainable structure distinct from a pattern of criminal activity, and with a continuity of existence, structure, and criminal purpose beyond the scope of individual criminal incidents." Interviews with law enforcement indicated skepticism over whether most East Harlem gangs would constitute criminal enterprises.

Another challenge to prosecuting these cases is the practice of "no snitching." Sharing information or observations with police about crime is frowned on by East Harlem juvenile gang members and some community adults.[33] One assistant district attorney mentioned "no snitching" as a barrier to solving cases.

---

32 Ibid.

33 U.S Department of Justice Office of Community Oriented Policing Services. "The Stop Snitching Phenomenon: Breaking the Code of Silence" 2008. July 22, 2011. http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/files/RIC/Publications/e030919195-Stop-Snitiching.pdf.

"of course you saw somebody fighting… but you don't want to snitch on your friends"   *-East Harlem Youth*

The "no snitch" culture is consistent with the tenuous relationship between the East Harlem Community and the NYPD. While the NYPD credits its aggressive "stop and frisk" and quality-of-life enforcement for the historic reductions in crime that have occurred over the past 15 years, and also argues it is responding to complaints received from the community about criminal activity, residents express deep concern about these practices. Many community members express a lack of understanding and frustration about police practices and interactions with youth on the streets. Advocates pointed to the high numbers of black and Latino youths who are arrested for marijuana possession as a particular source of concern.[34]

"…when I see the police I am scared of the police."   *-East Harlem Youth*

Another complicating factor is the lack of coordination among prevention, intervention and suppression efforts. While multiple criminal justice agencies and the Department of Education maintain gang units that gather information and strategize around responses, there is limited sharing of information among these units across agency lines.   Some agencies may collaborate on a case-by-cases basis as part of an investigative effort, but aggregate data on gang activity is rarely shared outside of law enforcement. Therefore, many local perceptions about youth gangs and violence are often based on media and street level word-of-mouth accounts.

Furthermore, though programs for young people exist in the community, the absence of effective communication and established referral procedures among providers, schools, law enforcement and civic groups often thwarts participation among at-risk young people. Police are often hard-pressed to connect youth to appropriate community providers that can meet their needs. Many providers acknowledge the lack of communication and value a more collaborative approach.

---

34 Levine, H & Person Small, D (April 2008) Marijuana Arrest Crusade: Racial Bias and Police Policy in New York City 1997-2007. New York Civil Liberties Union. See: http://www.nyclu.org/files/publications/nyclu_pub_marijuana_arrest_crusade.pdf.

"When we don't arrest them we send them home….there is no place to send these kids to."

-New York City Police Officer

Current Programming

Though there are considerable neighborhood challenges, East Harlem is relatively rich in youth programming. For example, the Human Services Consortium of East Harlem is a multi-agency effort to foster greater collaboration among East Harlem agencies, government services and local advocates to address human needs. East Harlem is also home to several venerable youth-servicing agencies including Union Settlement, the Children's Aid Society, SCAN/LaGuardia House, and the East Harlem Council for Community Improvement. One gap identified by the Task Force is the lack of programs providing regular and consistent outreach to high-risk gang-involved youths on the streets of East Harlem.

Given the lack of coordination between residents, providers and law enforcement, East Harlem is in need of targeted programs and strategies to reduce youth and gang violence that blend a robust outreach component with social services. The Council for Unity, an organization with a model known for reducing violence in schools and communities, is expected to begin serving three East Harlem Schools in the 2011-2012 school year. This is a step in the right direction but more needs to be done. Both the collective efficacy theory[35] and Operation Ceasefire research[36] argue that neighborhood violence varies with the capacity of the adults in the area to supervise, intervene and control local young people in public space. A community anti-violence culture relies not just on programs, but also on local residents taking responsibility to address violence and an emphasis on personal responsibility among community youth.

---

35 Sampson, Robert J., and Stephen W. Raudenbush. 1999. "Systematic Social Observation of Public Spaces: A New Look at Disorder in Urban Neighborhoods." *American Journal of Sociology* 105:603-651.

Sampson, Robert J., Stephen W. Raudenbush, and Felton Earls. 1997. "Neighborhoods and Violent Crime: A Multilevel Study of Collective Efficacy." *Science* 277:918-24.

36 Braga, Anthony A. and Christopher Winship. 2009. "What Can Cities Do to Prevent Serious Youth Violence?" *Criminal Justice Matters* 75(1):35-37.

Braga, Anthony A., David M. Kennedy, Elin J. Waring, and Anne M. Piehl. 2001. "Problem-Oriented Policing, Deterrence, and Youth Violence: An Evaluation of Boston's Operation Ceasefire." *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 38:195-225. Seabrook, John. 2009. "Don't Shoot." *New Yorker*, June 22.

Because teenagers' interactions move between physical and online contexts, control of physical neighborhood space may relate to control of digital space as well. Despite the increased use of social media by gang involved youth, parents, law enforcement and youth agencies are still behind the curve when it comes to deploying social media effectively to counter youth violence.

Finally, many organizations in East Harlem are hard pressed to address the needs of high risk youth beyond their doors. A recent op-ed by Union Settlement's Executive Director complained about the growing trend of government funders not to pay the full cost of contracted services and requiring non-profits to raise the additional required funding to cover the full cost of child care and other government services.[37] Gang prevention and intervention funding is virtually non-existent. For the past two years the Federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention has rescinded its comprehensive gang model request for proposal post-submission due to a lack of funding. Few foundations have stepped in to fill the gaps in youth services forcing many non-profit organizations to focus on youth willing to come through their doors; these are often not the most gang-involved high-risk juveniles.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this needs assessment, the Task Force has developed a companion Strategic Plan that outlines a comprehensive approach to addressing juvenile gangs and youth violence in East Harlem in three arenas: Prevention, Intervention and Suppression. Recommendations include:

- Developing procedures for improved interagency data sharing.
- Creating a public access juvenile justice data center made available free of charge to local communities to support efforts to address youth violence and gang involvement.
- Deploying evidence-based anti-violence strategies that are multi-faceted and address youth in their context (family, community).

---

37 NYC's unfair new policy underpays nonprofits for services they provide (Monday, August 29, 2011) New York Daily News Op-Ed by David Nocenti.

- Convening regular youth-police dialogues to improve communication between police and neighborhood youth.
- Improving education and awareness locally about disproportionate minority contact in the juvenile justice system.
- Hosting cyber-bullying education efforts in East Harlem elementary and middle schools.
- Encouraging local non-profits, NYCHA and local churches to develop street-based youth development activities in gang hot spot areas.
- Helping local businesses take advantage of the federal Work Opportunity Tax Credit which was expanded in 2008 to include disconnected youth.
- Developing a social network analysis research project focusing on youth gangs in East Harlem.
- Encouraging the Department of Education to expand its Gang Unit with a focus on developing approaches that rely less on exclusionary responses to gang behaviors.
- Improving training for teachers, parents and youth workers on effective approaches to help identify and engage high-risk, gang-involved youth.

This needs assessment was compiled with the help of many young people who shared their insights. The voices of East Harlem's youth are essential to any future approach for addressing youth violence and gangs. It is the intention of the Task Force to include young people in leadership roles as our efforts progress and to encourage our partners to do the same.

Methodology

This report describes the findings of an extensive community consultation and data collection process informed by the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's *Comprehensive Gang Model: A Guide to Assessing Your Community's Youth Gang Problem*.[38] The Comprehensive Gang Model is a research-informed approach that has been shown to reduce the influence of gangs in local communities.[39] As adapted by the Task Force, the process included the following elements:

Multi-Stakeholder Involvement: To ensure a diversity of perspectives, the Task Force included members from 21 government agencies, elected officials' offices, community-based organizations, academic institutions, and faith groups.

The Task Force met quarterly over the course of a year. The first meeting was Sept. 24, 2010; subsequent meetings took place on Dec.14, 2010, March 8, 2011, and June 7, 2011. Task Force members provided input and offered access to information on community events and local gang hot spots. Each meeting included a briefing by the NYPD about current gang activity. A summary of each meeting was prepared and distributed by the Task Force Coordinator.

Stakeholder Interviews: The Task Force developed a stakeholder interview protocol and questionnaire and conducted 13 stakeholder interviews between Sept. 2010 and March 2011 with law enforcement, service providers, and faith leaders. The stakeholder interview protocol and questionnaire is attached in Appendix B.

Focus Groups: Task Force staff developed a focus group protocol and questionnaire for adults and youth and conducted five focus groups between December 2010 and March 2011. Three focus groups were conducted with parents; one focus group was conducted with youth and another with law enforcement personnel. Parents who participated were recruited from a Youth

---

38 Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention/ Comprehensive Gang Model: A guide to Assessing Your Community's Youth Gang Problem, May 2009: http://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/Content/Documents/Assessment-Guide/Assessment-Guide.pdf.

39 Cahill, M., Hayeslip, D., (December 2010) OJJDP Juvenile Justice Bulletin. Findings from the Evaluation of OJJDP's Gang Reduction Program. https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/230106.pdf.

Violence Town Hall meeting that took place at Middle School 45 and from the Harlem Community Justice Center's youth programs. All participants were residents of Harlem with school-aged children or grandchildren. The youth focus group attendees were recruited from Isaac Newton Middle School for Math and Science in East Harlem, a neighborhood public housing development, and local youth-serving organizations. They varied in age from middle school to high school. The police officer focus group members were recruited from an East Harlem police precinct and included youth officers, beat cops, a community affairs officer and an auxiliary officer. The focus group protocol and questionnaire are available in Appendix C.

Additionally, two interviews were conducted with leading academic experts on youth delinquency and violence. The first interview was with Jeffery Butts, Director of Research and Evaluation at John Jay College (conducted on March 3, 2011). The second interview was with Dr. Andrew Papachristos, Robert Wood Johnson Health & Society Scholar at Harvard University and Assistant Professor at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst - Department of Sociology. The interview was conducted on March 4, 2011. Both of these interviews are excerpted on the Task Force's blog: https://rethinkingjuvenilegangs.blogspot.com.

Youth Survey: A researcher from the Justice Center developed a youth survey designed to gather youth perspectives on local gang violence and related issues. The survey was anonymous and was made available online through Survey Monkey. A paper version of the survey was distributed via Task Force member agencies and other service providers. A total of 156 surveys were collected. The findings are summarized later in this report. A copy of the survey can be found in Appendix D.

Site Visits: Task Force staff organized site visits to anti-violence programs in New York City. One site visit was to the Crown Heights Community Mediation Center's Save Our Streets (S.O.S.) program. S.O.S is a community-based effort to reduce gun violence in Crown Heights using the Chicago Ceasefire model.[40] The visit provided an opportunity for Task Force members

---

40 S.O.S. works closely with local organizations, neighborhood churches and pastors, community residents and the individuals most likely to commit a shooting. S.O.S. Crown Heights provides immediate intervention whenever a shooting occurs in the neighborhood, reaching out to the victim, friends, and family to ensure that a retaliatory shooting does

to learn from the outreach workers -- former gang members and ex-offenders -- about their experiences interrupting shootings and other acts of violence. A second site visit was conducted to the Council for Unity's program at Sheepshead High School in Brooklyn on Feb. 24, 2011. The Council for Unity specializes in reducing violence in schools, prisons, and communities by targeting gang-involved youth.

Community Meetings: Task Force staff attended 33 community meetings between July 2010 and May 2011. At the meetings, Task Force staff learned about youth violence and gang issues in East Harlem, met community leaders, and shared the work of the Task Force. Community meetings were hosted by police precincts, the District Attorney's Office, community groups, faith-based organizations, and elected officials.

Youth Dialogues: Task Force staff assisted in a local effort to engage youths and parents around the issue of youth violence in East Harlem organized by City Councilmember Melissa Mark-Viverito's office.   The first event was held on March 10, 2011, at Junior High School 99. The event attracted 140 people including 100 young people. The second event took place on May 5, 2011, at the Boys Club of Harlem. The event attracted 70 people, including 50 youths. Participants were recruited by staff from local organizations as well as flyers distributed in the neighborhood. These events provided additional information from youth and adult community members on the issue of youth violence. Task Force staff also facilitated two police-community dialogues involving residents from public housing developments and the Police Service Area 5 of the Housing Police Bureau; one took place with residents from Taft Houses in East Harlem, the other with residents at the Polo Grounds Housing Development in Central Harlem.

Ethnographic Research: Jeffrey Lane, a PhD candidate in Sociology at Princeton University, contributed to this report. As part of his doctoral studies, Mr. Lane has spent two and a half years conducting ethnographic research on Harlem street gangs and their use of social media.

---

not take place. S.O.S. Crown Heights works closely with neighborhood leaders and businesses to promote a visible and public message against gun violence. The goal is to end the spread of violence by encouraging local voices to articulate that shooting is an unacceptable behavior.

Data Collection: Task Force staff collected data from several sources for this report: information on active gang groups and alliances from the NYPD; referral case data from the New York City Law Department; data on juveniles under supervision from the New York City Department of Probation; index crime incidents in Harlem housing developments from the New York City Housing Authority; juvenile arrest data provided by the Mayor's Office of the Criminal Justice Coordinator; and truancy data from the Department of Education. Staff also reviewed numerous reports that are cited in the bibliography.

Bibliography

Blumberg, M., Burden, A., & Page, M. (2010) "Community District Needs: Fiscal Year 2010." New York City Department of City Planning. http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/pub/mnneeds_2010.pdf.

Bouchet, Stacey M. (January 2008) "Children and Families with Incarcerated Parents" A Report by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Pg. 3. http://www.fcnetwork.org/AECFChildren%20and%20Families%20with%20Incarcerated%20Parents%20Report.pdf

Boyd, Danah. "Why Youth (Heart) Social Network Sites: The Role of Networked Publics in Teenage Social Life." Pp. 119-142 in MacArthur Foundation Series on Digital Learning—Youth, Identity, and Digital Media Volume, edited by David Buckingham. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 2007.

Braga, Anthony A. and Christopher Winship. 2009. "What Can Cities Do to Prevent Serious Youth Violence?" 2009 Criminal Justice Matters 75(1):35-37.

Braga, Anthony A, David M.Kennedy, Elin J. Waring, and Anne M. Piehl, 2001. "Problem-Oriented Policing, Deterrence, and Youth Violence: An Evaluation of Boston's Operation Ceasefire." Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency 38:195-225.

Braga, Anthony A, David M. Kennedy, Anne M. Piehl, "The (Un) Known Universe: Mapping Gangs and Gang Violence in Boston" (1996), John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University Vol 8. 220-258.

Cahill, M., Hayeslip, D., "Findings From The Evaluation of OJJDP's Gang Reduction Program". (December 2010) OJJDP Juvenile Justice Bulletin. P. 2.

Celona, Larry, and John Doyle. "Harlem Teen Felled in Drive-by Shooting in Courtyard of Mom's Home; 30-year-old Man Hospitalized - NYPOST.com." *New York News | Gossip | Sports | Entertainment | Photos - New York Post*. 14 July 2011. http://www.nypost.com/p/news/local/manhattan/stray_bullet_horror_hjrtYLRUHkHl25Js8giI1H.

Citizens Committee for Children of New York, Inc, "Keeping Track of New York City's Children: A Citizens' Committee for Children Status Report 2008" http://www.cccnewyork.org/aboutkt.html.

Charles M. Katz, Vincent J. Webb, Kate Fox, and Jennifer N. Shaffer, "Understanding the Relationship between Violent Victimization and Gang Membership." <u>Juvenile Justice Update</u>, April/May 2011.

Fiscal Policy Institute "New York City in Great Recession: Divergent Fates by Neighborhood and Race and Ethnicity" December 2009 http://www.fiscalpolicy.org/FPI_NeighborhoodUnemployment_NYC.pdf.

Gardiner, Sean. "Rise Seen in Black Victims - WSJ.com." Business News & Financial News - The Wall Street Journal - Wsj.com. <u>Wall Street Journal</u>, 9 Mar. 2011.http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703560404576188963751906854.html?mod=WSJ_NY_LEFTThirdStories.

Green, Judith, Kevin Pranis, "Gang Wars: The Failure of Enforcement Tactics and the Need for Effective Public Safety Strategies" (2007) <u>A Justice Policy Institute Report.</u>

Gilligan, James. "Violence: Reflection on a National Epidemic*".* <u>Vintage Books: A Division of the Random House, Inc.</u> New York. P 89-102.

Heidi Evens, "Another Unhealthy Year for Harlem: Upper Manhattan Has the Highest Death Rate in NYC." <u>NY Daily News</u>. February, 24, 2011. http://www.nydailynews.com/ny_local/uptown/2011/02/24/2011-02 24_another_unhealthy_year_for_harlem.html#ixzz1FG7jK4Gh.

I Got Arrested! Now What? A Guide to the Juvenile Justice System (2010). <u>Center for Court Innovation</u>. http://www.courtinnovation.org/sites/default/files/comic_book.pdf.

Julie Bosman, "Number of People living on New York City Streets Soars." <u>New York Times</u>. March 19, 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/20/nyregion/20homeless.html.

Kennedy, David M "Practice Brief: Norms, Narratives, and Community Engagement for Crime Prevention" (2010) <u>Center for Crime Prevention and Control, John Jay College</u> http://www.jjay.cuny.edu/nnsc/pdfs/Haas_percent20practice_brief_finalwinter2010.pdf.

Kramer, Abigail "News Brief: City Youth and the NYPD." <u>The Center for New York City Affairs</u>. May 2, 2011.

Levine, H & Person Small, D (April 2008) Marijuana Arrest Crusade: Racial Bias and Police Policy in New York City 1997-2007. New York Civil Liberties Union. See: http://www.nyclu.org/files/publications/nyclu_pub_marijuana_arrest_crusade.pdf.

Ley, David and Roman Cybriwsky. "Urban Graffiti as Territorial Markers." <u>Annals of the Association of American Geographers</u> 1974. 64: 491-505.

Mondelkeern, Michael. "As School Suspensions Soar, Many Seek a Different Approach." Gotham Gazette - the Place for New York City Policy and Politics. Gotham Gazette, April 2011. http://www.gothamgazette.com/article/education/20110401/6/3503.

New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, 2008 Community Health Survey Data. http://home2.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/data/data.shtml#mn.

New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Community Health Profiles, Second Edition (New York: NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, 2006).

New York City District Attorney's Office Press Release (2/26/11) District Attorney Vance Announces Takedown of 14 Members of Violent Street Gang: http://www.manhattanda.org/whatsnew/press/2011-02-16.shtml.

New York City Housing Authority Safety and Security Task Force Report (February 2011). Resident Survey based on a representative sample of 1100 NYCHA residents in May 2010. http://www.nyc.gov/html/nycha/downloads/pdf/safety_and_security_task_force_2-17-11_webfinal.pdf.

New York City Police Department Press Release (9/13/10) citing FBI Uniform Crime Reports Data. http://www.nyc.gov/html/nypd/html/pr/pr_2010_nyc_safest_big_city.shtml.

New York State Juvenile Justice Advisory Group. "Tough on Crime: Promoting Public Safety by Doing What Works" (2010) A Report to the Governor and Legislature. http://criminaljustice.state.ny.us/ofpa/pdfdocs/toughoncrimereport.pdf

New York Times http://graphics8.nytimes.com/packages/pdf/nyregion/20110208regentsGradRates.PDF.

New York Times Homicide Mapping Tool. http://projects.nytimes.com/crime/homicides/map.

NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services citing FBI Uniform Crime Reports data.

Office of Epidemiology and Planning, Baltimore City Health Department. Examination of Youth Violence in Baltimore City, 2002-2007. Baltimore City, Maryland: Baltimore City Health Department. August 2009. www.baltimorehealth.org/dataresearch.html.

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention/ Comprehensive Gang Model: A guide to Assessing Your Community's Youth Gang Problem, May 2009 http://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/Content/Documents/Assessment-Guide/Assessment-Guide.pdf.

Papachristos, Andrew. "Gang Word" (2005) Foreign Policy March/April 2005 P. 48-55.

Phillips, Susan A. "Wallbangin': Graffiti and Gangs in L.A. Chicago": University of Chicago Press. 1999.

Public Advocate for the City of New York/Old Problem, New Eyes: Youth Insights on Gangs in New York City, December 2008. http://publicadvocategotbaum.com/policy/documents/gangs-recs-comboreportfinal.pdf.

Richard A. Ball & G.David Curry "The Logic of Definition in Criminology: Purposes and Methods for Defining "Gangs." Criminology: 1995 Vol. 33, No 2. See also: James C. Howell. (2009), Preventing and Reducing Juvenile Delinquency: A Comprehensive Framework. Sage.

Robers, Simmons, Thomas Snyder, Jennifer Truman, Jijun Zhang. "Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2010" (2010) U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Justice Office of Juvenile Programs. http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/pub/ascii/iscs10.txt.

Sampson, Robert J., Stephen W. Raudenbush, and Felton Earls. "Neighborhoods and Violent Crime: A Multilevel Study of Collective Efficacy." Science. 1997 Vol 277:918-24.

Sampson, Robert J., and Stephen W. Raudenbush. "Systematic Social Observation of Public Spaces: A New Look at Disorder in Urban Neighborhoods." American Journal of Sociology 1999 Vol.105:603-651.

Seabrook, John. "Don't Shoot." New Yorker, June 22, 2009.

Sullivan, Mercer. "Maybe we Shouldn't Study "Gangs": Does Reification Obscure Youth Violence?" (2005) Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice Vol. 21 170:190.

United States, Census Bureau, 2006 American Community Survey (United States: Census Bureau, 2007). http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/html/census/popacs.shtml.

U.S Bureau of Labor Statistics (May 2011). Employment status of the civilian population 25 years and over by educational attainment.http://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t04.htm.

US Department of Justice/Office of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention. Highlights of the 2008 National Youth Gang Survey. http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/229249.pdf.

Vitale, Alex S."City of Disorder: How the Quality of Life Campaign Transformed New York Politics". New York: NYU Press 2008.

Williams, Timothy, and Tanzina Vega. "As East Harlem Develops, Its Accent Starts to Change - New York Times." The New York Times - Breaking News, World News & Multimedia. New York Times, 21 Jan. 2007. http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/21/nyregion/21east.html.

Yeebo, Yepoka. "Two Kids Injured in East Harlem Shooting, Police Say - DNAinfo.com." Manhattan Local News - New York Neighborhood News - Breaking News - DNAinfo.com. 23 Sept. 2010. http://www.dnainfo.com/20100923/harlem/two-kids-injured-east-harlem-shooting-police-say.

Zhao, Shanyang, Sherri Grasmuck, and Jason Martin. "Identity Construction on Facebook: Digital Empowerment in Anchored Relationships." Computers in Human Behavior 2008 24(5):1816-1836.

Appendix A: Summary of Interviews and Focus Groups

Summary of Stakeholder Interviews

Task Force staff conducted thirteen stakeholder interviews from September 2010 through March 2011, utilizing an interview protocol developed by the Task Force Coordinator and Researcher. The questions in the protocol addressed perceptions of safety, the types of crime that pose the greatest risk, gangs, and the current responses to gangs and youth violence. Stakeholder interviews were conducted with administrators of youth service programs, defense attorneys and prosecutors, police officers and clergy. There were many areas of agreement and some strong opinions on the causes of juvenile gang involvement and youth violence.

Community Strengths

Each interview began by exploring perceptions about community strengths – existing ways that the community is able to provide support for improved public safety, health, and general welfare. Several stakeholders highlighted the sense of family in the neighborhood and the tight bonds among residents. The availability of community programs was identified consistently as neighborhood strength. One director of a youth center described community programs as *"an extension of the family providing a sense of security."* Another stakeholder described in rich detail the diversity of the community and *"the sense of the village coming together"* when there are problems.

Youth Gangs & Violence

> *"The physical violence leads to fear and fear leads to gun shots, I think more kids are shot out of the fear."*

> *"It's a never ending cycle of violence and we have no time for healing."*
> *-- Interview Participants*

When stakeholders were asked about visible signs of youth violence, many responded with references to youth gangs. One stakeholder stated, "*Youth on youth crime is the biggest threat.*"

Gun violence creates a climate of fear that sometimes discourages families in need from taking advantage of services in the community. One director of a local youth development program adjacent to a public housing development said, *"There has been a rash of shootings… everyone is just pulling out a gun to solve conflicts. We have had some young people whose parents have said 'I just can't have my kid there, it is not safe'… it impacts the students because some of them who had a zest for life are now seeing this turn and they think I have nothing to live for, why do I need to set goals or have dreams."*

A police officer indicated that *"robberies are the first step; they lead to shootings and other crimes."* Another police officer stated: "*I get calls from officers late at night that they have massive amounts of kids between the ages of twelve to nineteen on a particular street corner fighting."*

When asked what issues are causing the problem of juvenile gangs and youth violence in East Harlem, many interviewees identified the lack of parental supervision, poor choices by youths themselves, and a lack of programs for youth, particularly after 6pm. One defense attorney also indicated a need for more mental health services for justice-involved youths and additional alternative to incarceration programs. NYCHA developments were also singled out as places where juvenile gang activity flourishes. Some respondents described the long-standing conflicts between different developments as a contributing factor to youth violence. One director of a youth program described sending a young person on an errand only to have the young person indicate that he could not travel to that area because of the hostilities between his public housing development and another development.

Unlike the majority of stakeholders interviewed, one stakeholder was not sure there is a juvenile gang problem. Describing the phenomenon of *"wannabes;"* youths that claim gang involvement but are not really gang members. According to the interviewee real gang members *"are hesitant to let others know, those who are willing to talk about it are not really in."*

Community programs could do a much better job of engaging parents according to one police representative interviewed. The neighborhood needs more *"programs that have the unique ability to incorporate parents and kids. That is one of the greatest challenges because of the large number of parents who are working two, three jobs...they are not able to be an integral part of their children's lives…"* Some felt that religious institutions could *"step up more to fill the gaps."* One stakeholder said: *"With all due respect to the churches... these kids are not part of their community publicly."* Others mentioned the need to help families become aware of services that are available and to assist them in engaging those services: *"Programs are there, but people don't know they are there... that's the problem, getting these kids into existing programs."*

The phenomenon of youth being raised by a grandparent was identified as a contributor to gang involvement and gang violence. According to one interviewee: *"You can't expect a whole generation of grandmothers, many of whom did not do a good job of raising their own children, to provide enough structure to raise a whole generation of kids who have no parents."*

There was also concern expressed about the relationship between police and community. One stakeholder said: *"The only consistent response to the problem has been a law enforcement response… there is some danger to driving all of the response from a law enforcement end. I don't see these communities standing up and saying thank you for that kind of approach."* Even police initiated programs that work with youths have suffered from a lack of resources.

When asked which types of crime posed the greatest risk, individuals reported stealing cellphones and iPods, shootings, homicides and grand larceny. One police officer said, *"East Harlem is becoming more dangerous, but it is not as dangerous as other areas of the city*." He went on to describe quality-of-life issues like youths congregating to sell drugs, panhandling, loitering as larger issues, and suggested that there was a need for more "*youth programs."* The choices for young people are limited, even "*libraries and parks are cutting back on their hours*."

Potential Solutions

There were several solutions highlighted by stakeholders in the interviews, including:

- More programs and better advertising of programs so youth and families know what is available.
- Extended hours for programing, especially late night and weekends.
- Greater access to employment for young people.
- More transparency and accountability at the NYPD, especially as it relates to stop & frisks occurring in the community.
- More street-based mentoring and targeted outreach to high-risk youths.
- Staff that are skilled at working with high-risk youths at local programs.
- Monetary incentives to encourage youths to participate in needed programs.
- Programs to improve relationships between police and youth.
- Education efforts that focus on improving youth decision-making and non-violent problem-solving skills.
- Programs to teach youths and parents how to deal responsibly with social media.

Summary of Focus Groups

Task Force staff held five focus groups utilizing a series of structured questions and prompts designed to solicit participants' perceptions of community strengths, youth violence and gang involvement. All groups were facilitated by the Task Force Coordinator and a social work intern. Additionally, Task Force staff facilitated two police-community dialogues and two youth community dialogues initiated by City Councilmember Melissa Mark-Viverito's Office.

Youth Perspectives

One youth focus group member indicated that she does not go to Jefferson Park because her cousin was assaulted there. Another indicated that people just stand and watch when an act of violence occurs in public: *"my cousin recently got shot and robbed and people just kept walking by."* Several participants said that they did not like the police and felt that police officer misbehavior frequently goes undisciplined. One youth questioned police tactics stating: *"[when]*

kids are fighting in the street the cops are standing there ...they don't tell you stop then they just start hitting you."

Gun shots and drug sales were another consistent concern. One youth said: *"When we went to church and we was walking home we heard a gun shot...when we got to my building we heard gun shots again."* Participants described specific businesses where drugs are sold. Fridays and Saturday nights and after school hours were indicated as times when violent crimes tend to occur.

Some participants described distrust of the police: *" At Jeff [Jefferson Houses] there's cameras everywhere so when you fight you keep you hats down and you see the big paddy wagon driving through and they just grabbing you… and putting you in their car for no reason… the people who fighting their hair is all messed up but [the cops are] just grabbing the people who watching it [asking] 'what did you see?'…of course you saw somebody fighting…they take you and they write it up and they say they going to catch those people but you don't want to snitch on your friends …and then they try to scare you when you get there [saying] 'you can get put in a cell', we're kids, why you going to put us in a cell, but we not going to snitch on our friends."* During the police-community dialogues one ten-year old girl stated: *"when I see the police I am scared of the police."* Another young teen expressed frustration at being constantly *"harassed"* in front of his building: *"I wanted to know why police officers didn't know which kids lived in a building and why they don't approach youth in a respectful manner."*

Focus group participants described gang involvement in the following ways: *"Most people join gangs because they want to have more power… [and] to get things that they want," "people are in gangs to be safe."*

Potential solutions identified by youth participants included more after-school programs, school-based prevention programs, mentoring, trips, and the Fresh Air Fund. Programs that allow youths to play popular video games, participate in youth development activities, and interact with sports figures were suggested as well. One youth said: *"kids in gangs like to play basketball and games*

39

as well." They acknowledged the importance of peers, especially negative peers who can influence a young person to join a gang.

Police Perspectives

The police officers viewed working with community leaders as one reason they enjoyed working in East Harlem. Police officers also mentioned East Harlem's location as strength, indicating that East Harlem provides easy access to transportation and shopping.

Police officers said that working in East Harlem is risky, pointing to crimes such as domestic violence, gang violence, drug dealing and gun violence. One officer mentioned, *"too many kids have access to guns…it's scary."* All the officers who participated in the focus group agreed. One stated: *"you know a problem exists when children 12 years old are involved in shootings."* Officers also agreed that gangs have contributed to youth violence in the neighborhood, stating that *"youth (gangs) have made their blocks territorial and therefore have conflicts with other youth (gangs) whenever they venture out of the block they have claimed."* Officers mentioned that peer pressure causes teens to join gangs as a safety mechanism. Several officers identified the lack of positive role models as a contributing factor in East Harlem.

Youths loitering in large groups were identified as a significant concern by police. Officers shared that youths congregate in groups of up to 100 at times which has led to violence. One officer said: *"youth have nowhere to go."* Police Officers expressed particular frustration with the lack of resources available to them when working with local youths. One officer stated, *"When we don't arrest them we send them home….there is no place to send these kids."* Another officer continued, *"Home is not always the best place for some youths, but we are not aware of community resources for youth."* A third officer said with disappointment, *"I would like to see more community members taking ownership of the youth violence problem. We cannot do it alone."* Both youth and law enforcement focus group members highlighted Friday and Saturday nights as especially volatile. They emphasized that the relatively easy access to weapons contributes to the violence.

When asked about solutions, a few officers suggested greater utilization of community policing approaches. Some officers offered increased police participation in community events, including

reviving midnight basketball. Many officers also identified a need for more after-school programming. One officer noted that a meaningful solution to youth violence and gangs will not be achieved until the Police Department prioritizes youth violence.

Parent Perspectives

Task Force staff held three parent focus groups. When asked about community strengths, some parents responded that they appreciated East Harlem's easy access to shopping and transportation. But others had a difficult time expressing positive community aspects. One parent said: *"If you live and make it here (Harlem), you can make it anywhere…Harlem teaches youth to grow up tough and resilient."*

Parents expressed concern about high incidents of robberies, the dangers posed to their children traveling to and from school, and the prevalence of school-based violence. Parents expressed the view that much of the youth violence occurs due to misunderstandings and the inability of some young people to resolve problems without resorting to violence. One parent added: *"youth need a program to help them deal with conflict."* Unlike the feedback expressed in the stakeholder interviews, many parents felt that services for youth were lacking in the community—jobs and after school programs were specifically highlighted. Where some parents were aware of local youth programs, those named tended to be large or well established institutions such as the YMCA and the Boys and Girls Club. There was an expressed need for more information about available programs for youth in the community.

Not surprisingly, *parents* also expressed that public housing developments were frequent sites of conflict between youths. Parents worry about growing gang involvement among young people, many of whom view gangs as a second family. Parents expressed concern about the number of robberies in the neighborhood and their impact on young people. One parent said: *"I used to go straight to sleep when I went to bed, now I am restless worrying about my son."*

Solutions expressed by parent focus group participants include; keeping community centers open later, more homework help programs, additional programs that get kids out of the neighborhood. A couple of parents mentioned the need for elected officials to *"step up and do more".* These parents felt that elected officials should work on getting the community together to address youth

41

violence and prioritize youth violence in their agendas. Parents shared that programs that do exist in Harlem are under-utilized. One parent observed, *"at-risk youth don't like rules, many of these programs have rules like no sagging pants…program leaders need to learn to talk to youth not talk at youth."* The same parent went on to say that *"New York City may want to consider curfews for youth like other cities have done."*

Appendix B: Summary of Youth Survey

To gather youth perspectives of the gang violence in the neighborhoods of Harlem, an anonymous youth survey was developed and circulated both online and via paper copies. The survey was made available on Survey Monkey from December 17, 2010 through March 31, 2011. The survey instrument, designed by the Justice Center's researcher, was informed by a youth gang survey developed by the Rhode Island Justice Commission. It consisted of questions about youths' perceptions of youth gangs, perceived safety in their communities and schools, and experiences with gangs and gun violence. To distribute the survey, the Task Force cast a wide net among member agencies and undertook direct outreach to local schools and youth programs. Staff at partner organizations encouraged participants to complete the survey, and Task Force staff made the survey available to all youths involved in Justice Center programs. Service providers who wished to distribute a paper survey were provided with paper copies of the survey which we later merged with the dataset obtained from the online survey. The Gang Task Force collected 156 completed surveys in total. A copy of the survey instrument can be found as Appendix D.

Demographics

The demographics of the survey respondents are presented in the table below. The mean age of participant was 15 years old, and the majority was of school age, in middle or high school. The majority of respondents reported that they were currently attending school (96 percent). The respondents were overwhelmingly minority, with 83 percent identifying as Black/African-American or Hispanic/Latino.

Demographics of Survey Respondents (n=156)

Mean Age	15
Gender	
Male	60 percent
Female	40 percent
Race/Ethnicity	

Black/African-American	54 percent
White/Caucasian	2 percent
Hispanic/Latino	29 percent
Asian/Pacific Islander	1 percent
Multi-Racial	9 percent
Other	5 percent
Attending School	96 percent
Grade in School	
7th/8th Grade	38 percent
High School (9-12)	58 percent
High School Grad/GED	2 percent
College	2 percent

Perceptions of Youth Gangs: Youth were asked several questions relating to their perceptions of the youth gang problem in neighborhoods in Harlem. Questions involved the extent and seriousness of the gang problem, the amount of violence and gun violence for which youth gangs were responsible, and the reasons young people join gangs. The respondents' answers to these questions are presented in the tables below.

Perceptions of Youth Gangs in Harlem (n=156)

How serious a problem do you think youth gangs are in your community?

A really serious problem	63 percent
Somewhat of a problem	29 percent
Not a problem	8 percent

How much violence are youth gangs responsible for in your community?

All of the violence	25 percent
Some of the violence	50 percent
None of the violence	3 percent

Not sure	22 percent

How much gun violence are youth gangs responsible for in your community?

All of the violence	20 percent
Some of the violence	46 percent
None of the violence	7 percent
Not sure	27 percent

Which of the following reasons do you think explain why kids in your community join gangs? (Check all that apply)

Family members or friends in the gang.	51 percent
To get more respect from others.	51 percent
To get protection from others.	49 percent
To feel more important and belong.	46 percent
To get money and/or drugs.	44 percent
Think it will be like joining a family.	35 percent
Gangs pressure kids to join.	30 percent
Makes them more attractive to the opposite sex.	26 percent
They are bored and it's exciting.	21 percent
Gangs recruit members.	21 percent
I do not know why kids join gangs.	17 percent

The majority of respondents (63 percent) felt that youth gangs were a really serious problem in their communities. Most youth respondents felt that kids join gangs because their family members or friends are in a gang (51 percent), for protection (49 percent), and to feel better about themselves and that they belong to something (46 percent). Most youth did not feel that gang pressure and recruitment were significant reasons why youths join gangs, indicating that youths feel that kids seek out opportunities to join gangs. Interestingly, most respondents did not feel that kids join gangs because they are bored and seeking excitement.

Youths were also asked questions about youth gang activities in their community. Questions involved how they would identify member of a gang in their community and which activities gang members do together in the neighborhood.

Which of the following ways help you tell that someone in the community belongs to a gang? (Check all that apply)

Gang handshakes or hand signals	55 percent
Gang signs, symbol, or graffiti	54 percent
Word of mouth – someone tells you	44 percent
Gang colors	42 percent
Gang tattoos	30 percent
Gang initiations	28 percent
Different gang language	28 percent
I don't know.	16 percent

Which of the following activities do you think gang members in your community do together? (Check all that apply)

Hang out on the streets	73 percent
Fight with other gangs and people.	62 percent
Drink alcohol	61 percent
Do drugs	60 percent
Go to parties	60 percent
Sell drugs	56 percent
Rob people	50 percent
Cruise and look for guys/girls	47 percent
Do graffiti	38 percent
Steal from stores	37 percent
Do vandalism	30 percent
Steal cars	20 percent
Break into houses	20 percent

The majority of youths identify gang members in their communities through gang handshakes or hand signals (55 percent) and gang signs, symbols, or graffiti (54 percent). Only 16 percent of youth report that they do not know how to identify someone in their community who belongs to a gang. The majority of respondents believe that gang members are involved in serious delinquent activity when they are together including fighting with other gangs and other people (62 percent), drinking alcohol (61 percent), doing drugs (60 percent), selling drugs (56 percent), and robbing people (50 percent). Two of the top activities that were identified with gang members involve violence.

Experiences with Youth Gangs and Gun Violence: In addition to questions about their perceptions of youth gangs, respondents were also asked questions related to their personal experiences with youth gangs and gun violence in their communities. Questions included whether they knew people in a gang, whether they knew about gang members in their schools, and whether they had previous experiences with gun violence in their communities. The respondents' answers to these questions are presented in tables below.

Do you have any friends or family members who are gang members?

Yes, friends	21 percent
Yes, family members	3 percent
Yes, both friends & family members	21 percent
No	41 percent
Not sure	14 percent

Are there any gang members in your school?

Yes	53 percent
No	12 percent
Not sure	35 percent

Explain your experience with gun violence in your neighborhood (check all that apply).

Heard about someone who has been shot.	56 percent
Known someone who has been shot.	55 percent
Friends have witnessed a shooting in their neighborhood.	29 percent
Afraid of being shot at night or on weekends.	28 percent
I don't have any previous experience.	21 percent
Witnessed a shooting in my neighborhood.	20 percent
Afraid of being shot during the day.	18 percent
Been the victim of gun violence.	8 percent

Some respondents reported that they did not know any gang members (41 percent), but an almost equal percentage (45 percent), reported that they knew at least a friend or family member who was a gang member. The majority (53 percent) reported that they knew of gang members in their school, while 35 percent were not sure whether or not there were gang members at school. Though a very small percentage (8 percent) had been victims of gun violence, the majority reported that they had heard about or known someone who had been shot. A moderate percentage of youth (21 percent) reported that they had no previous experience with gun violence in their neighborhood.

Perceived Community and School Safety: Additionally, youths were asked questions related to their perceptions of safety in their neighborhoods and schools. Questions involved whether or not they felt safe on their way to and from school, at school, and in their neighborhoods at night and on the weekends. The respondents' answers to these questions are presented in the tables below.

How safe do you feel in your neighborhood on your way to and from school?

Very safe	46 percent
Sometimes safe	46 percent
Not safe at all	4 percent
Not sure	3 percent

I am not going to school.	1 percent

How safe do you feel when you are at school?

Very safe	56 percent
Sometimes safe	28 percent
Not safe at all	7 percent
Not sure	6 percent
I am not going to school.	3 percent

How safe do you feel in your neighborhood at night and on the weekends?

Very safe	44 percent
Sometimes safe	43 percent
Not safe at all	7 percent
Not sure	6 percent

Even though the majority of youth previously reported that they felt youth gangs were a really serious problem in their community, the overwhelming majority of respondents felt safe on their way to and from school (92 percent) and at night and on the weekends (87 percent).

Respondents were also asked whether or not they had avoided doing certain things in their communities because of a fear of gangs. The majority said they did not avoid doing anything in their neighborhoods because of a fear of gangs. However, some youths reported that they did avoid frequenting certain areas of their neighborhood (37 percent) and that they carried a weapon for protection (22 percent). This response was extremely worrisome considering some of the respondents were as young as eleven years old. The results of this question are presented below.

Do any of the following apply to you because you were afraid of gangs? (Check all that apply)

Avoided going into certain areas of the neighborhood	37 percent
Carried a weapon	22 percent

Avoided walking alone in your neighborhood	20 percent
Avoided going out at night	20 percent
Avoided going to parties	17 percent
Avoided going to rec activities or joining sports teams	10 percent
Avoided hanging out with friends	9 percent
Avoided going into stores	8 percent
Avoided going to school	7 percent

Potential Solutions: Finally, in order to garner input about potential effective prevention strategies, youths were asked what they believed would be the most effective ways to prevent young people from joining gangs in their communities. The respondents' answers to this question are presented in the table below.

Which of the following activities do you think would prevent kids from joining gangs?
(Check all that apply)

Help kids learn to say no to peer pressure.	47 percent
Explain dangers of gangs to kids.	45 percent
Teach kids to solve problems without violence.	44 percent
More job training and jobs for kids.	43 percent
More after-school, evening, and weekend activities.	39 percent
Make family life better so kids won't join gangs.	33 percent
Provide mentoring for kids in bad family situations.	33 percent
Make neighborhoods safer so gangs aren't needed for protection.	32 percent
More police patrols.	31 percent
Change schools so kids do better & don't need gang support.	22 percent
I don't know what can be done.	14 percent

Most of the solutions offered involved prevention education including helping kids resist peer pressure (47 percent), explaining the dangers of gangs to kids (45 percent), and teaching kids to solve problems without resorting to violence (44 percent). Some respondents suggested activities

to keep kids occupied after school including more job opportunities (43 percent) and more after-school, evening, and weekend activities (39 percent). Fewer respondents felt that community and family prevention strategies would be effective ways to prevent young people from joining gangs.

Appendix C: Stakeholder Interview Protocol

Purpose: To get community input on the youth violence issue and juvenile gangs from individual criminal justice system players, community service providers, those who reside or work in the community, raise children there, and use its streets, schools and parks.

How to do it: Meet with recognized leaders and residents in the community (local police, prosecutors, clergy, school officials, city government workers, local residents, youth and service providers, etc.).

Checklist: The following is a checklist of recommended steps to conduct key stakeholder interviews as part of the Needs Assessment for Youth Gang Task Force:

1.   Identify the interviewer(s).

2.   Develop a list of key stakeholders to interview.

3.   Finalize the interview format and questions.

4.   Schedule and conduct interviews.

5.   Prepare a written summary of each interview as soon as possible after it takes place (including, where appropriate, actual quotes for future reference). Retain summaries in H Drive under Youth Program in the Planning Tools and Protocols folder.

6.   Synthesize results of stakeholder interviews into a summary to be circulated among core planning group members.

7.   Use feedback from the interviews to adjust planning objectives as needed.

PREPARATION

The interviewer needs to establish a comfortable and relaxed approach consistent with his or her personal style, demonstrate flexibility and be able to speak authoritatively about the Justice Center and the Gang Task Force initiative. The interviewer should guide the conversation through prompts that appropriately encourage the interviewee to clarify important points. Note taking should capture key information (and when possible, important quotes) without distracting from the conversation flow. Interviews should be recorded when possible with the consent of interviewee. It is helpful to have a second person who can take notes in case it is not possible to record the conversation.

Following is a sample script for use by the interviewer(s). It is important that there be consistency from interview to interview in how the Task Force is explained and which questions are asked.

INTRODUCTION

"Thank you for taking the time to meet with me.

The Harlem Community Justice Center, as part of its youth programming, is interested in researching the youth violence and juvenile gang involvement in East Harlem. East Harlem juveniles continue to suffer higher rates of victimization compared to the rest of New York City, and often at the hands of other juveniles. East Harlem juveniles are also more likely to experience the juvenile justice system and have a parent or relative who has been to prison or jail. These factors make later criminal justice system involvement more likely.

The Justice Center has received funding to conduct a needs assessment and develop a strategic plan to address youth violence and juvenile gangs in East Harlem. Through literature reviews, data gathering, stakeholder interviews and focus groups, we hope to capture the current trends as it relates to youth violence and juvenile gang involvement in East Harlem. Over the long term we seek to develop a collaborative neighborhood-based approach that reduces youth violence and victimization and provides pathways to success for community youth. We also hope to influence policy and practice towards strategies that have been proven to reduce violence and victimization among youth.

A) Purpose of the interview

"This interview is part of a larger needs assessment that the Justice Center is conducting to ensure full consideration of the views and opinions throughout the East Harlem community and within the criminal justice system and city government."

B) Summary of procedure

"The interview will last approximately one hour.   I hope you don't mind if I take notes, but I

want to be sure I remember the key points you make. If we want to use any quotes that are attributable to you by name in the materials produced for the Task Force we will seek your permission. Before we begin, please give me your full name and title as you would like it recorded for this interview."

Note: When appropriate ask for permission to audio record the interview. All audio recorded interviews should have an oral consent recorded.

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

I.   COMMUNITY STRENGTHS

Main Question:

1. *As a [INSERT ROLE—police chief, prosecutor, etc.] what do you view as the main strengths of the East Harlem community, specifically in dealing with high risk and gang involved youth?*

Additional Prods:
   •What do you think are the best things about living or working in East Harlem?
   •Please identify some important community resources for high risk youth (e.g. schools, parks, community-based organizations, political leadership, geographic locations, and other positives).

II.   COMMUNITY CONCERNS AND PUBLIC SAFETY ISSUES (in general)

Main Question:

1. *From your perspective as [INSERT ROLE – police chief, prosecutor, etc.] what are the types of crime that pose the greatest risk to you personally?*

Additional Prods:
   • *What are some of the more pressing public safety concerns in East Harlem?*
   • What other types of crimes concern you most?

III.   COMMUNITY CONCERNS AND PUBLIC SAFETY ISSUES (specifically youth violence and gangs)

Main Question:

1. *As a [INSERT ROLE – police chief, prosecutor, etc.], what are the primary concerns and problems around youth violence currently facing the East Harlem Community?*

Additional Prods:

- What are the visible signs that this problem exists in the community?
- Have you or someone you known been affected by youth violence? How?

2. *Do you perceive a youth gang issue in East Harlem?*

Additional Prods:

- What are the visible signs that this problem exists in the community?
- What issues are contributing to the gang and youth violence issues in East Harlem?
- Do you know or have you observed community youth who identify with a gang?

Additional Prods for Law Enforcement, City Government and Faith-Based Leaders

1. Are you ready to respond to it? If so, how?
2. What challenges do you see in implementing solutions?
3. What suppression strategies were used historically in this neighborhood? What strategies are in use now? Law enforcement only

Additional Prods for Youth-Serving Organizations

1. How has your organization worked with high-risk youth?
2. What challenges has the organization faced working with high-risk youth?
3. What other solutions might be available?

Additional Prods for Parents

1. Are your children in a gang or at-risk of getting involved in a gang? Why?

2. What do you think are some potential solutions to deal with youth gangs and violence?

Additional Prods for Residents

1. Are you affected on a daily basis by youth gangs and youth violence? If so, how?
2. What do you think are some potential solutions to deal with youth gangs and violence in your community?
3. Are you or anyone you know a member of a gang?
4. Why do you believe youth join gangs?
5. Do you think youth violence is a problem in the community?

IV. PEOPLE & RESOURCES

Main Question:

Are there specific individuals or organizations that you believe are important for me to contact?

Appendix D: Focus Group Protocol

Purpose: To get community input surrounding the issue of youth violence and gang involvement from those not involved in the individual stakeholder interviews. This list includes youth from the community, community advocates/workers, community leaders/stakeholders, parole officers, police officers, clergy leaders, business owners, community residents, etc.

How to do it: Assemble groups of about 8 to 10 people each. Choose a setting that is comfortable and convenient for participants. Begin each focus group with a brief explanation of why you have assembled the group.

Time: 1.5 to 2 hours

Checklist: The following is a checklist of recommended steps to conduct focus groups:

Focus Group Checklist
·   Decide on the number of focus groups to be conducted, and the theme of each.
·   Identify the facilitator(s).
·   Develop a list of focus group members to invite to the sessions.
·   Finalize the focus group format and questions.
·   Determine the appropriate sequencing of the focus group sessions.
·   Schedule and conduct the focus groups.
·   Record and prepare a written transcript of each focus group session.
·   Synthesize results of the focus group sessions into a summary to be circulated among Task Force members.
·   Use the feedback from the focus group sessions to adjust planning objectives as needed.

PREPARATION

Focus groups may include, for example, the following groupings: people who live and work in the East Harlem community, representatives from the faith-based community, social service providers, youth from the community, youth involved in gangs, law enforcement and corrections players, crime victims/advocates and treatment specialists. It is important to include persons with differing experiences and opinions about youth violence and gangs, not just people who know a lot about these issues or make their living by it.

If possible, make refreshments available before each session to help promote a welcoming, conversational atmosphere. Each focus group participant should have a tag

listing his/her name and community affiliation. Invite the focus group participants to introduce themselves.

The facilitator needs to establish a comfortable and relaxed approach consistent with his or her personal style, demonstrate flexibility and be able to speak authoritatively about the project. The facilitator should guide the conversation through prods that appropriately encourage the participants to clarify important points. Suggested prods are provided along with required questions.

Differing perspectives are important in the process. If a particular point of view is missing the facilitator should raise the issue in a neutral manner. For example, when discussing public perceptions about public safety problems it might be difficult for participants to raise issues of race and class in a focus group. The facilitator can encourage discussion of these issues and help participants feel comfortable by indicating that even critical or difficult information will aid the planning process.   The facilitator can frame neutral questions around a difficult or critical issue to encourage dialogue.

Note taking or recording should capture key information (and when possible, important quotes) without distracting from the conversation flow. Recording focus groups electronically will insure accuracy, but may make focus group participants uncomfortable. Use your discretion. You should obtain focus group participant permission prior to the focus group if you plan to record the session.

Have in place a confidentiality protocol that guarantees that focus group materials will only be used for reporting purposes and will be attributed anonymously, including in cases where the identity of the speaker is easily inferable (e.g. if you use a title in describing someone like "police chief," the identity of the speaker is easily discernable; police "representative" may be an appropriate option in this instance). When a direct quote is desired, the participant's approval should be gained and they should be given an opportunity to see the quote in the context it is being used prior to public release.

Following are some tips for effective focus group facilitation, as well as a sample script and facilitation tips for use by the facilitator(s). It is important that there be consistency from focus group to focus group in how the project is explained and which questions are asked.

12 TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE FOCUS GROUP FACILITATION

During a focus group the facilitator is probing for viewpoints and the reasons participants hold particular viewpoints. The facilitator should avoid responses or other cues that bias participant feedback. The following tips can help you facilitate a focus group effectively:

1.   Know your group. Review the group member bios or other information prior to the event.
2.   Room set up: Seat group members in a semi-circle or around a table so they can see each other and you comfortably.

3.   Recording: Make sure you have enough flip charts and markers (optional) and that any recording instruments are operating (check the batteries of your recording device and test it prior to the meeting).

4.   Start and end on time.

5.   During introductions communicate your role as the facilitator. Remind participants that you are acting as a neutral facilitator. Your role is to encourage discussion and probe for more information, not to give or endorse any particular point of view or opinion.

6.   Pay attention to group dynamics in the room. Notice alliances, divergent cues and comments. Be prepared to step in as needed to re-focus the conversation.

7.   Allow cross-participant conversation as long as it adds richness to the discussion. Refocus participants by restating questions, summarizing and reframing.

8.   Recognize strongly held views by restating and acknowledging the importance of the person's view to them. Remind participants that the information is being recorded and that their statements will be part of the record for planning purposes.

9.   Praise participants for speaking and contributing to the discussion. However, never say or show agreement with the content of participant's statements; remain neutral. If asked to agree, re-focus the discussion back to the questions.

10.   Make eye contact with each group member when they speak as a sign that you are listening.

11.   Stick to the questions. Consistency in the order and approach is important.

12.   Thank participants at the end and let them know how they can receive updates about the Task Force if they desire.

INTRODUCTION

"Thank you all for taking the time to meet with me.

The Harlem Community Justice Center, as part of its youth programming, is interested in researching the youth violence and juvenile gang involvement in East Harlem. East Harlem juveniles continue to suffer higher rates of victimization compared to the rest of New York City, and often at the hands of other juveniles. East Harlem juveniles are also more likely to experience the juvenile justice system and have a parent or relative who has been to prison or jail. These factors make later criminal justice system involvement more likely.

The Justice Center has received funding to conduct a needs assessment and develop a strategic plan to address youth violence and juvenile gangs in East Harlem. Through literature reviews, data gathering, stakeholder interviews and focus groups, we hope to capture the current trends as it relates to youth violence and juvenile gang involvement in East Harlem. Over the long-term we seek to develop a collaborative neighborhood-based approach that reduces youth violence and victimization and provides pathways to success for community youth. We also hope to influence policy and practice towards strategies that have been proven to reduce violence and victimization among youth.

A) Purpose of the focus group

"This focus group is part of a larger needs assessment that the Justice Center is conducting to insure full consideration of the views and opinions throughout the East Harlem community and within the criminal justice system and city government."

B) Summary of procedure

"The focus group will last approximately one and a half to two hours. I hope you don't mind if I take notes, but I want to be sure I remember the key points made. If we want to use any quotes that are attributable to any individual by name in the materials produced for the Task Force we will seek that individual's permission. Before we begin, if everyone is comfortable doing so, lets go around the room and introduce yourself to the others in the group."

Note: when appropriate ask for permission to audio record the focus group. It is important that every individual speaking identify themselves before speaking in order to identify who said what.

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR FOCUS GROUP

I. COMMUNITY STRENGTHS

Main Question:

> 2. ***As a [INSERT ROLE—police chief, prosecutor, etc.] what do you view as the main strengths of the East Harlem community, specifically in dealing with high risk and gang involved youth?***

Additional Prods:

> ●What do you think are the best things about living or working in East Harlem?

> ●Please identify some important community resources for high risk youth (e.g. schools, parks, community-based organizations, political leadership, geographic locations, and other positives).

II. COMMUNITY CONCERNS AND PUBLIC SAFETY ISSUES (in general)

Main Question:

2. *From your perspectives as [INSERT ROLE(s) – police officers, prosecutors, etc.] What are the types of crime that pose the greatest risk to you personally?*

Additional Prods:

- What are some of the more pressing public safety concerns in East Harlem?
- What other types of crimes concern you most?

III. COMMUNITY CONCERNS AND PUBLIC SAFETY ISSUES (specifically youth violence and gangs)

Main Question:

1. *As [INSERT ROLE – police officers, prosecutors, etc.], what are the primary concerns around youth violence currently facing the East Harlem community?*

Additional Prods:

- What are the visible signs that this problem exists in the community?
- Have you or someone you know been affected by youth violence? How?
- What are the youth gang primary concerns around East Harlem?
- What issues are contributing to youth violence in East Harlem?

Additional Prods:

- What are the visible signs that this problem exists in the community?
- What issues are contributing to youth gang issues in East Harlem?
- Do you know or have you observed community youth who identify with a gang?

IV. COMMUNITY PROGRAMMING/INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

Main Question:

1. *As [INSERT ROLE(s) HERE] what do you think community leaders, government or law enforcement can do to address issues of gangs and youth violence in the community? (These can be expansions on existing programs/organizations or new programming ideas)*

Additional Prods:

- What kind of programs/activities/interventions are currently missing in the community?
- What currently existing programs, if any, are rarely utilized and/or attended?
  - Why do you think these programs not being utilized more?
- Do you know if any of the programs or activities are informed by good research?

Additional Prods for Law Enforcement, City Government and Faith-Based

1. How has your organization worked with high-risk youth?
2. What challenges do you see in implementing solutions?
3. What suppression strategies were used historically in this neighborhood? What strategies are in use now)? **Law enforcement only**

Additional Prods for Youth-Serving Organizations

1. How has your organization worked with high-risk youth?
2. What challenges has the organization faced working with high-risk youth?
3. What other solutions might be available?

Additional Prods for Parents

1. Are children you know in a gang or at-risk of getting involved in a gang? If so, why do you think they are in a gang or at-risk of getting involved?
2. Do you know children who are in a gang or at-risk of gang involvement?
3. What do you think are some potential solutions to deal with youth gangs and violence?

V. PEOPLE & RESOURCES

Main Question:

1. Are there specific individuals or organizations that you believe are important for me to contact?

Note: A second protocol was developed for focus groups with youth. The protocol is available upon request.

Appendix E: Harlem Youth Survey

INTRODUCTION

To Facilitators:
Thank you for distributing this survey amongst the youth you work with and allowing them the time and space to complete it. The data and information gathered from this survey will greatly increase the impact of our findings and ensuing interventions.

Please read the following instructions to youth before allowing them to access the survey.

To Youth:

"Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

The Harlem Community Justice Center, as part of its youth programming, is interested in researching the youth violence and juvenile gang involvement in East Harlem. East Harlem juveniles continue to suffer higher rates of victimization compared to the rest of New York City, and often at the hands of other juveniles. East Harlem youth are also more likely to be arrested, prosecuted and locked-up.

We want to include the opinions of youth members of the community. The responses you provide will be used to help reduce youth violence in East Harlem.

*In a minute you will be asked to access and complete a survey online. The survey is confidential; your name **will not** be attached to the survey. The survey takes about 10 minutes but please take your time and answer all questions honestly."*

Survey Monkey Instructions:

"Please go to the link:
http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/harlemyouthsurvey
Please read the directions carefully before you start."

"For multiple choice questions with circles next to the answers please select the best fitting answer. For questions with blank spaces to fill in, please type the best fitting answer in the box. For questions with boxes next to the answers that also state 'check all that apply' please select all best fitting answers (if multiple answers apply)."

A) Purpose of the survey

"This survey is part of a report that the Harlem Community Justice Center is preparing to insure full consideration of the views and opinions throughout the East Harlem community on youth violence and youth gangs. The survey was designed specifically to solicit input from youth."

B) Summary of procedure

The survey will last approximately 10 minutes. The survey will be available online until February 15, 2011. Survey responses will be analyzed and reported in the final needs assessment report which will be available online. If you have any questions about this survey, please call Bryn Herrschaft, Researcher at (212)360-4122.

Age: _____

Gender: _____

Race: _____

Are you in school? _____

Grade in school: _____

What is your zip code? _____

Questions:
1) How serious a problem do you think youth gangs are in your community?
   a. Youth gangs are a really serious problem.
   b. Youth gangs are somewhat of a problem.
   c. Youth gangs aren't much of a problem.
   d. Youth gangs aren't any problem.
   e. I don't know whether youth gangs are a problem.
2) How much violence are youth gangs responsible for in your community?
   a. All of the violence.
   b. Most of the Violence.
   c. A little of the violence.
   d. None of the violence.
   e. Not sure.
3) How much gun violence are youth gangs responsible for in your community?
   a. All of the violence
   b. Some of the violence
   c. None of the violence
   d. Not sure
4) Do you have any friends or family members who are gang members?
   a. Yes, Friends
   b. Yes, Family Members
   c. Yes, Both Friends and Family Members
   d. No
   e. Not Sure
5) How safe do you feel in your neighborhood on your way to and from school?
   a. Very Safe.
   b. Sometimes Safe.

     c. Not Safe At All.

     d. Not Sure.

6) Are there gang members in your school?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Not Sure
   d. I am not going to school.

7) How safe do you feel when you are at school?
   a. Very Safe.
   b. Sometimes Safe.
   c. Not Safe At All.
   d. Not Sure.

8) How safe do you feel in your neighborhood at night and on weekends?
   a. Very Safe.
   b. Sometimes Safe.
   c. Not Safe At All.
   d. Not Sure.

9) Check all that apply: Which of the following ways help you tell that someone in your community belongs to a youth gang?
   a. Gang signs, symbols, or graffiti
   b. Gang colors
   c. Gang tattoos
   d. Gang handshakes or hand signals
   e. Word of mouth – someone tells you that person belongs to a gang
   f. Gang initiations
   g. Different gang language
   h. I don't know how to identify that someone belongs to a youth gang.

10) Check all that apply: Explain your experience with gun violence in your neighborhood.
   a. I have been the victim of gun violence.
   b. I have known someone who has been shot.
   c. I have heard about someone who has been shot.
   d. I have witnessed a shooting in my neighborhood.
   e. One of my friends has witnessed a shooting in my neighborhood.
   f. I am afraid of being shot in my neighborhood during the day.
   g. I am afraid of being shot in my neighborhood at night or on the weekends.
   h. I don't have any previous experience with gun violence.

11) Check all that apply: Which of the following reasons do you think explain why kids in your community join gangs?
   a. Kids have family members or friends in the gang
   b. Kids join the gang for protection from others.
   c. Kids join the gang to get more respect from others.
   d. Kids join the gang to feel more important and feel like they belong.
   e. Kids join the gang because they are bored and it is exciting.
   f. Kids join the gang to get money, drugs, etc
   g. Kids think joining the gang will be like joining a family.

    h. Kids think it will make them more attractive to the opposite sex.

    i. Gangs pressure kids to join.

    j. Gangs recruit members.

    k. I do not know why kids join gangs.

12) Check all that apply: Which of the following activities do you think gang members in your community do together?

    a. Hang out on the streets.

    b. Fight with other gangs and other people.

    c. Do drugs.

    d. Drink alcohol.

    e. Sell drugs.

    f. Go to parties.

    g. Cruise and look for girls/guys.

    h. Do graffiti.

    i. Do vandalism.

    j. Steal from stores.

    k. Steal cars.

    l. Rob people.

    m. Break into houses.

13) Check all that apply: Do any of the following apply to you because you were afraid of gangs?

    a. Avoided going into certain areas of your neighborhood.

    b. Avoided going out at night.

    c. Avoided walking alone in your neighborhood.

    d. Carried a weapon.

    e. Avoided going to parties.

    f. Avoided going to school.

    g. Avoided hanging out with friends.

    h. Avoided going to stores.

    i. Avoided recreational activities or joining sports teams...

14) Check all that apply: Which of the following activities do you think would prevent kids from joining gangs?

    a. Explain the dangers of gangs to kids

    b. Help kids learn how to say no to peer pressure to join a gang.

    c. Teach kids how to solve problems without using violence.

    d. More job training and jobs for kids.

    e. More police patrols.

    f. Make neighborhoods safer so gangs aren't needed for protection.

    g. Make family life better so kids won't join gangs.

    h. More after-school, evening, and weekend activities for kids.

    i. Provide mentoring for kids in bad family situations.

    j. Change schools so kids will do better in school and don't need gang support.

    k. I don't know what can be done to prevent kids from joining gangs.

Appendix F: East Harlem Youth Gangs

23 PCT
BDS – BROAD DAY SHOOTERS (formerly OYG East)
    -Washington Houses, East 97th – 104th Sts, 2nd – 3rd Aves
6$N or 6NET or 6th STREEK NETWORK
    -Carver Houses, East 99th – 106th Streets, Park to Madison Aves
ABM – ALL BOUT MONEY aka Jeff Mob
    -Jefferson Houses, East 112th – 115th Streets, 1-3 Aves
AIO- AIR IT OUT aka MAB Madison Ave Boys aka SOG Square off Gang
    -Taft Houses, East 112th – 115th Streets. Park to 5th Aves
TMG – TRU MONEY GANG
    - Johnson Houses, East 112th – 115th Streets, Park to 3rd Aves
TFG – TEAM FLY GUYS (aka Whoadeys)
    -Lehman Houses, East 107th – 110th Streets, Madison Ave
EA– EAST ARMY
    -East River Houses, East 102nd – 105th Streets, 1st Ave
    -Franklin Plaza, 106th – 108th Streets, 1st to 3rd Aves
VGS – VAGOS
    -East 116th – 117th Streets, 1st – 3rd Aves
25 PCT
LOE – LINCOLN OVA EVERYTHING
    -Lincoln Houses, East 132nd – 135th Sts, Park to 5th Aves
FETTI BOYS -
    -East 117th – 119th Streets, Lexington to Park Aves
CMB – CASH MONEY BROTHERS
    -1990 Lexington Ave, East 122nd St, Lex to Park Aves
FBz – FLOWBOYS (subsets TMT, 3TM, 20 Block)
    -Wagner Houses, East 120th – 124th Sts, 2nd Ave – Paladino Ave
    -Taino Towers, East 122nd – 123rd Sts, 2nd – 3rd Aves

WBz – WINGBOYZ/AK
        -AK Houses, East 126th – 130th Streets, Lexington to Park Aves

The Harlem Community Justice Center, a project of the Center for Court Innovation in partnership with the NYS Unified Court System, seeks to solve neighborhood problems—including youth crime, landlord-tenant disputes, and the challenges faced by parolees—in East and Central Harlem. As a multi-jurisdictional civil and family court, Harlem is unique among community courts. Among the many non-traditional services the Justice Center has assembled under one roof are: programs to help local landlords and tenants resolve conflicts and access financial support; programs for at-risk youth, including a youth court; and reentry programs for adult ex-offenders returning to the community. Ultimately, the project's long-term goal is to test the extent to which a court can work together with a community to spur neighborhood renewal.

For more information contact:

Christopher Watler
Project Director
Harlem Community Justice Center
170 East 121st Street
New York, NY 10035
212-360-4110
watlerc@courtinnovation.org
Website: http://www.courtinnovation.org/project/harlem-community-justice-center

Visit our blogs:
http://rethinkingjuvenilegangs.blogspot.com/

http://rethinkingreentry.blogspot.com/