



East Harlem Juvenile Gang Task Force

2011 Strategic Plan

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 Unit

New York City Department of Probation

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 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

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This report is dedicated to the young people of East Harlem.

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Executive Summary

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 youths 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.*

The needs assessment provided detailed accounts and perspectives from area youth, parents, faith leaders, service providers and police. This strategic plan offers a blueprint to reduce juvenile gang involvement and youth violence going forward based on the following key findings from the needs assessment:

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.

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.

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.

Law enforcement, 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.

The Community of East Harlem

East Harlem -- New York City Community District 11 -- stretches from 96th Street to 126th Street from Fifth Avenue to the East River in Manhattan. 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. Youth in particular, confront considerable challenges.

According to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's Socioeconomic Mapping and Resource Topography (SMART) system, East Harlem is rated 10 out of 10 on the community disadvantage index, meaning that East Harlem is poorer than 100 percent of communities nationally.¹ Not surprisingly, twenty-five percent of children live below the poverty line.² In 2009 the unemployment rate for greater Harlem and Washington Heights, including East Harlem, was 13.6 percent, compared to 9.1 percent for Manhattan and 10.1 percent for all of New York.³

Young people in East Harlem are more likely to grow up in public housing than youth in other parts of the city. 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.

Local public schools struggle with high rates of suspensions, truancy and poor academic performance. Twenty percent of East Harlem kids were chronically absent from school in 2010 and area schools had a total of 1,592 suspensions in the 2009 school year.⁴

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

2 Ibid.

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

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

Young people in East Harlem also confront significant health concerns. According to the New York City Administration for Children's Services, the local 2010 rate 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.⁵ The New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene ranks East Harlem among the neighborhoods with the highest rates of asthma in New York City.⁶ Furthermore, the Health Department indicates that between 19 and 24 percent of East Harlem residents are obese.

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. Crime rates among young people are also disproportionately high in the community. According to 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.⁷ 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.⁸ 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.⁹

Recommendations

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. And given the New York City Police Department's information regarding the increase in the number of gangs in the community, as

⁵ 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.

⁶ NYC Department of Health Community Health Survey Atlas 2009. See: http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/downloads/pdf/epi/nyc_commhealth_atlas09.pdf.

⁷ New York City Department of Juvenile Justice, 2008 Community District Detention Rate report.

⁸ Information obtained from the New York State Office of Children and Family Services.

⁹ Information obtained from New York City Department of Probation.

well as the number of active members, the time is ripe to mount a collaborative effort to stop the growth of juvenile gangs and violence in East Harlem.

This Strategic Plan proposes a set of recommendations and serves as a call to action to address the key findings outlined in the needs assessment. The challenges and recommendations are grouped into three categories in accordance with the Comprehensive Gang Model: prevention, intervention and suppression.¹⁰

Prevention

According to the United States Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, prevention includes programs and services designed to decrease the likelihood that youth who have already displayed early signs of problem behavior or who are exposed to multiple known risk factors for gang activity will join a gang.¹¹

- 1. Problem:** Mistrust between law enforcement and neighborhood. Community members expressed a lack of understanding and frustration about police practices and observed disrespectful interactions with youth on the streets. East Harlem is not unique relative to other communities of color in this regard; distrust between residents in communities of color and law enforcement is a long-running and pervasive issue in many American cities. Research shows that communities of color are more likely to view law enforcement actions not only through the lens of current practice, but as an accumulation of the experiences of their friends, loved ones and acquaintances over time. Thus, practices such as high volume "stop and frisk" may contribute to feelings of resentment and distrust.¹² Furthermore, research in both Chicago and New York City demonstrates that communities that lose faith in the basic legitimacy and competence of police may experience more crime over time.¹³

10 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>

11 The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Program Report "Comprehensive Gang Model: Planning for Implementation" May 2009. See:

<http://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/Content/Documents/Implementation-Manual/Implementation-Manual.pdf>

12 Burson, Rod. 2007 "Police Don't Like Black People": African-American Young Men's Accumulated Police Experiences. *Criminology and Public Policy*. Vol 6,pgs 71-101

13 Kane, Robert J. 2005. Compromised police legitimacy as a predictor of violent crime in structurally disadvantaged communities. *Criminology* vol.43:469-98. See also, Kirk, David S. and Andrew V. Papachristos. (2008). "Legal Cynicism and the Framing of

Recommendations:

- a. Convene Police-Community/Youth Dialogues: Neighborhood organizations (e.g. churches, youth programs) should work with the NYPD to convene regular dialogues with local youths to foster improved understanding of police tactics and to build trust between local officers and the community. To combat misconceptions and improve communication, these dialogues should include local commanders, beat officers and tactical units (narcotics and gang officers) and concerned youth and adults. These events should take place in non-law enforcement settings in East Harlem --community centers, churches, etc.
 - b. Hold Annual Youth Resource Fairs: Continue the annual end-of-summer youth resource fair begun by the Harlem Community Justice Center and NYPD. The youth resource fair is an opportunity at the beginning of the school year for youths as well as parents to learn about job opportunities, after-school programs and other services in the Harlem community. Beyond connecting families to resources, the fair is also an opportunity for young people to engage police in a positive context.
2. **Problem:** High rates of suspensions and chronic absenteeism are clear warning signs for school failure and serious delinquency, including gang involvement. Poor school performance and attendance can also serve as a predictor of becoming a victim or perpetrator of violence.

Recommendations:

- a. Invest in School-Based Violence Prevention Programs: The Department of Education should invest in school-based violence prevention programs that are evidence-informed. One program worth noting is Council for Unity (CFU), which helps students develop non-violent solutions to gangs and violence.¹⁴ Although a rigorous evaluation has not been done on the Council for Unity program, a

Neighborhood Violence: Implications for 'Neighborhood Effects' Research." American Journal of Sociology, 116(4), 1190-1233.

¹⁴ Council for Unity: see <http://www.councilforunity.org/aboutUs.php>

demonstration site (Sheepshead Bay High School in Brooklyn) attributes student success and reduced violence to the model. And a report by the Boys and Girls Club of America highlights Council for Unity as a successful strategy for gang-involved youth.¹⁵

- b. Develop Truancy Intervention Programs: Youths who are truant are at greater risk of educational failure and justice system involvement. The Department of Education should convene a local truancy reduction team to identify chronically truant juveniles in local elementary and middle schools and to develop specific intervention strategies in each school. The team should explore initiatives like Attendance Courts,¹⁶ the Brooklyn District Attorney’s Office T.R.A.C.K program,¹⁷ mentoring¹⁸ and incentive and recognition programs that acknowledge improved attendance.
- c. Provide Social Media Training to Youth: Given the prevalence of social media and the general lack of information about its responsible use, the Department of Education should develop “Social Media 101” training for parents and students in elementary and middle schools. This effort would promote responsible social media use. Parents would learn how to set appropriate limits for their children – and how to spot signs that their child might be gang-involved. Working with parent coordinators, multi-lingual cyber-bullying prevention tip sheets and workshops could also be developed. One New York City school has already implemented something similar.¹⁹ For justice-involved youths, the Department of Probation should consider developing an abbreviated education program to promote responsible social media use.
- d. Develop Online Peer Leaders: Many non-gang youths are “friends” online with their peers who are gang involved and are often “cyber witnesses” to cyber

15 Boys and Girls Club of America (2004) “Programming for Gang-Involved Youth” See: http://www.councilforunity.org/PDFs/rpt_bgca.pdf

16 Attendance Court is a truancy prevention program that provides students and their families with services and other resources in a supportive, community setting in order to keep chronically absent students out of family court. Attendance court provides schools with a new tool to address chronic lateness and unexcused absences before they rise to the level where school officials must file a formal report alleging educational neglect.: see; <http://www.courtinnovation.org/project/attendance-court>

17 Kings County District Attorney’s Office: Truancy Program see:<http://www.brooklynda.org/track/track.htm>

18 Anna M. Phillips (November 10, 2011) Truant Students Are heeding Their Wake Up Calls. New York Times/WNYC SchoolBook. <http://www.nytimes.com/schoolbook/2011/11/10/truant-students-are-heeding-their-wake-up-calls/?ref=nyregion>

19 Yaniv, Oren. New Brooklyn School Mott Hall Bridges Academy to give kids “internet smarts” New York Daily News. August 8, 2011. [http://www.nydailynews.com/ny_local/2010/10/14/2010-10-](http://www.nydailynews.com/ny_local/2010/10/14/2010-10-14_kids_may_have_street_smarts_but_internet_smarts_is_a_whole_different_story_the_s.html)

14_kids_may_have_street_smarts_but_internet_smarts_is_a_whole_different_story_the_s.html

bullying and escalating tensions among of rival gangs. The Department of Education and local youth serving agencies should explore the development of online peer leaders who would be trained to send messages of peace and respect in the face of cyber bullying and online gang-related conflicts.

3. **Problem:** A lack of quality youth development programming for East Harlem teens, especially safe space to gather and socialize.

Recommendations:

- a. Create More Safe Places: Public spaces like parks are not always perceived as safe and neutral spaces by young people. The availability of teen centers that are open into the evening hours is limited and many programs would have a hard time addressing the needs of high-risk youth. The Department of Youth and Community Development should work with the New York City Housing Authority, Community Board, Parks Department, local leaders, and non-profit groups to develop more recreational and social activities for teens. For example, supervised teen parties with a strong message of violence prevention during late evening hours on a Friday or Saturday could provide a safe place for socialization during a time when youths might be exposed to delinquent or criminal activity.
- b. Develop Street-Based Youth Development Activities in Gang Hot Spot Areas: In East Harlem young people often limit or adjust their travel in the community to avoid victimization by local gangs. Regaining public spaces for youth development activities would accomplish multiple goals at the same time. Street-based youth development activities could include “play streets” programs similar to those operated by the Police Athletic League, sports competitions, and social and cultural events.
- c. Reinstate the Youth Coordinator Position at the Community Board: The Community Board is New York City’s most local unit of government. It provides a vehicle for the community to address emerging needs. The Youth Coordinator positions at local community boards were eliminated years ago as a cost savings measure. The City should consider reinstating the Youth Coordinator role in

select community districts that, like East Harlem, are struggling with youth gangs and violence. A Youth Coordinator could provide ongoing leadership in East Harlem, helping to organize local youths as part of an overall strategy of gang prevention.

- d. Promote Youth Leadership: The Task Force, working with the Community Board, local elected officials and community groups, should create a Youth Leadership Council. The Council could develop a mini-grant program as a vehicle for encouraging young people to develop projects that address gangs and violence. With a relatively small amount of funding, the Council could solicit youth-generated proposals for local anti-violence projects – e.g. murals; youth speak outs, family fun events, peace marches, etc.
- 4. Problem:** Limited opportunities for gang prevention and intervention training for front-line staff in schools, law enforcement and community agencies.

Recommendations:

- a. Develop Training on Recognizing and Addressing Gang Involvement: Juvenile gang behavior is not static: it evolves constantly as new groups develop and existing groups adapt to changes in their environment (i.e. law enforcement activity). Existing gang trainings typically cater to law enforcement. Many are national in scope. To be effective, training should be delivered locally using neighborhood information and target not just law enforcement but teachers, youth workers, probation officers and others. Topics should include: screening for gang involvement, effective counseling strategies, and intervention for de-escalating group conflicts.
- b. Develop a gang prevention tool kit for East Harlem: Of course professionals aren't the only ones who interact with gang-involved young people. Parents, religious leaders, family members, and friends can use help too. To educate this population it is worth developing a tool kit that would include safety planning tips, basic facts about local gangs, contact information for police and local

programs and other tools which could be made available at no cost online and through local schools.

5. **Problem:** High levels of youth unemployment in East Harlem.

Recommendations:

- a. Expand the Summer Youth Employment Program: Youths and parents in East Harlem consistently articulate a need for more job opportunities as a youth violence and gang reduction strategy. The Department of Youth and Community Development should actively seek to encourage additional federal funding that would expand the number of Summer Youth Employment opportunities in East Harlem.
- b. Promote the Disconnected Youth Work Opportunity Tax Credit Among Employers: This federal program was expanded in 2008 to include disconnected youth ages 16-25 who are unemployed and have not attended school or attained a GED/High School Diploma in the six months prior to being hired.²⁰ Local workforce intermediaries and elected officials should conduct an education campaign with local businesses to encourage the hiring of disconnected youths, which would entitle employers to a \$2,400 tax credit.

6. **Problem:** A lack of evidence-based violence prevention programs in East Harlem.

Recommendations:

- a. Deploy Evidence-Based Anti-Violence Strategies That are Multi-Faceted and Address Youths in Their Natural Context: There are a number of programs capable of expanding in East Harlem. These include: CASASTART program in Washington Heights which targets youth in high-risk environments to reduce their exposure to drugs and criminal activities; and, Multi-systemic Therapy, an

²⁰ Internal Revenue Service Work Opportunity Credit: <http://www.irs.gov/formspubs/article/0,,id=177948,00.html> ; <http://www.irs.gov/newsroom/article/0,,id=208572,00.html>.

intensive family-and community-based treatment program that focuses on chronic juvenile offenders.²¹

- b. Develop Policies in Public Housing That Encourage Families to Seek Help: Given the concentration of gangs in and around public housing, the New York City Housing Authority should explore development of specific anti-violence programs. NYCHA, working with legal service providers and others, should explore policies that would encourage parents of non-violent gang-involved youth to seek services without fear of eviction. Any approach should include a review of regulations concerning tenant privacy and due process.

²¹ Multisystemic Therapy: see <http://mstservices.com/index.php/what-is-mst/what-is-mst>

Intervention

Intervention with high-risk or gang-involved youth includes community-based programs that balance the delivery of services and educational and employment opportunities with supervision and accountability. Intervention services typically involve an individual risk/needs assessment, case management, service referrals, coordinated service delivery, and supervision.

1. **Problem:** A lack of readily available information on the full nature of the problem of juvenile gang involvement in East Harlem to inform local efforts.

Recommendations:

- a. Create an Online Public Access Juvenile Justice Data Center: The NYC Criminal Justice Coordinator's Office, working with the NYPD, should explore creating an online juvenile justice data center where local communities can receive regularly updated information on key juvenile justice indicators – e.g. juvenile arrests, calls for service, mapped information about juvenile crime hot spots, and known gang activity. Access to this information would support local communities in developing effective strategies to respond to juvenile gangs and youth violence.
2. **Problem:** Far too many young adults in East Harlem are disconnected from the workforce.

Recommendations:

- a. Tax Credits: In addition to the federal Work Opportunity Tax Credit, the City should explore the use of targeted tax credits for employers who hire (full or part time) justice-involved youth. Applying for the credit should be simplified and made easy so small businesses can readily take advantage of the program. The City's Small Business Services agency should lead the development of this effort in partnership with the Department of Youth and Community Development.
- b. Expand the NYC Justice Corp Program: The NYC Justice Corps partners community groups, justice agencies and employers to invest in the development

of court-involved young adults.²² Recently, the Justice Corps opened a new Harlem office which serves cohorts of twenty-five young adults in cycles. The Justice Corp should look for opportunities to serve more young adults, including young men and women who identify as gang members.

- c. Expand Existing Mentoring Programs: Research suggests that mentoring programs can have a positive long-term impact on participants, including reduced criminal involvement. Faith-based groups can play a central role in the provision of mentoring services to youth gang members. Given this, local mentoring efforts should be encouraged, including those that target older gang-involved youths.²³
 - d. Provide Tattoo Removal Services: Tattoos are a visible indication of gang involvement that can hinder a gang member's attempts to move away from gang life. The City should explore funding a pilot program for gang members that combines tattoo removal with counseling and employment assistance.
3. **Problem:** The majority of young people surveyed indicated that gangs are active in their schools.

Recommendations:

- a. Use Youth Courts to Address Low Level Offending: Recently, the Harlem Community Justice Center began a pilot program with the Manhattan District Attorney's Office to have low-level criminal cases of youth ages 16-19 referred to the youth court where respondents must discuss their behavior with their peers and complete a restorative sanction—e.g. community service, letter of apologies. Going forward, other justice system players – including judges and probation officials – should look for opportunities to make use of youth courts.
- b. Improve the Capacity of Schools to Address Gangs: The Department of Education should expand its Gang Prevention and Intervention Unit to provide more robust gang awareness education and technical assistance to schools. As part of this

²² New York City Justice Corp. See: <http://nycjusticecorps.org/>.

²³ A Report by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Program. "Best Practices to Address Community Gang Problems" See: <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojdp/222799.pdf>.

expanded effort, the DOE should create a website for school staffs, parents and students to access the latest information on gang prevention and intervention strategies. This effort might include the development of more effective responses to student disciplinary code violations that utilize counseling, cognitive behavioral therapies, restorative justice and youth development activities, rather than suspensions or other exclusionary practices.

4. **Problem:** A systematic process for assessing gang involvement is lacking.

Recommendations:

- a. Develop a Screening Instrument: The Task Force should work to develop and pilot a gang involvement screening tool to aid schools, justice agencies, and youth programs. Ideally, the tool would help to determine a client's level of gang involvement allowing for targeted responses based on a young person's needs.
5. **Problem:** Strengthen diversion opportunities along the continuum of a juvenile's engagement with the justice system.

Recommendations:

- a. Expand Options for Local Police to Divert Cases. Police have broad discretion when they engage a juvenile. The Task Force should explore policies and practices that encourage police diversion of status offenses and certain non-violent misdemeanor cases. In Portland Oregon, for example, a police diversion effort seeks to reduce the number of youth going to detention centers and through the formal justice system. A Juvenile Reception Center in downtown Portland receives all youths, aged 11-17, arrested for misdemeanor offenses (non person to person) and status offenses. A team of social workers assesses each case and makes a determination if the child and his or her family can be served by the Center, which provides continuous case management, family and individual counseling, overnight stays, and social service referrals, including child welfare

referrals in situations with abuse or neglect. This approach has helped Portland reduce the use of detention and disproportionate minority confinement.

- b. Develop Restorative Justice Options for Court-Involved Juveniles:** Restorative justice practices include circle conferences between victims and youth offenders, community-service that directly “pays back” the victim for their loss, and victim-offender mediation. These restorative justice practices recognize the rights of victims and the need for offenders to understand how their behavior has harmed another person and their community.

Suppression

Suppression strategies are formal and informal social control procedures.²⁴

1. **Problem:** Lack of information about relationships among different gangs and gang members.

Recommendations:

- a. Deploy new techniques to understand how gang members are connected and how their relationships contribute to violent behavior. The Task Force should develop a “social network analysis” research project focusing on youth gangs in East Harlem. Social network analysis in its simplest form is a map of specific ties, such as friendships, between people or organizations. Social network analysis has been used in public health to analyze the spread of diseases. In criminal justice, it is used in cities like Boston and Los Angeles to understand how people are connected and how their relationships contribute to violent behavior.²⁵ This approach can help to identify which individual members are most likely to commit violence or be victims of violence and should be the focus of enhanced enforcement and intervention. It can also help law enforcement to better understand the underlying structures of individual street groups.²⁶ The results of a social network analysis could be used to more effectively target both law enforcement and social service responses.

24 The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Program Report “Comprehensive Gang Model: Planning for Implementation” May 2009. See: <http://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/Content/Documents/Implementation-Manual/Implementation-Manual.pdf>.

25 Kennedy, D.M., Braga, A.A., and Piehl, A.M. (1997) “The (un)known universe: Mapping gangs and gang violence in Boston” Crime Mapping and Crime Preventing, edited by D. Weisburd and T. McEwen. New York, NY: Criminal Justice Press.

http://www.popcenter.org/library/crimeprevention/volume_08/08-Kennedy.pdf; see also, Papachristos, Braga and Hureau. Six--Degrees of Violent Victimization: Social Networks and The Risk of Gunshot Injury. http://www.nnscommunities.org/six_degrees_boston.pdf.

26 National Network for Safe Communities. See: http://www.nnscommunities.org/Chicago_VRS_SNA_Notes_from_the_Field_0505_FINAL.pdf
<http://www.nnscommunities.org/pages/events.php>.

2. **Problem:** Public housing is a focal point for much of the juvenile gang activity in East Harlem, with a small number of developments accounting for a large share of gang activity and youth violence.

Recommendations:

- a. Develop Targeted Street Outreach Efforts: The Harlem Community Justice Center, in partnership with New York City Housing Authority, should develop a pilot program to reduce youth and gang violence in East Harlem housing developments. The program should include community mobilization efforts modeled on the Chicago Ceasefire program now being used in Central Brooklyn to reduce shootings. The pilot should include an outreach team of “violence interrupters” that engage gang-involved youths on the street, as well as community vigils and rallies that respond to each shooting incident.
 - b. Target Gang Hot Spots: The NYPD should develop special strategies in and around areas designed as gang hot spots. This might include the regular assignment of specific beat officers specially trained who understand the gang problem and effective youth engagement techniques.
3. **Problem:** Gang involvement is often initiated or strengthened in detention centers, jails and prisons.

Recommendations:

- a. Conduct Pre-Release Outreach to Families: A pilot project should be initiated under the leadership of the Upper Manhattan Reentry Task Force to promote positive family involvement in the reentry process. This pilot should begin working pre-release with the gang member and their family to address barriers and promote desistance from crime.
- b. Improve Discharge Planning: Returning to gang life after release from prison can be a tempting option, as gangs may represent an immediate pathway to economic and social stability. The reestablishment of gang affiliation often occurs within the first days after release from institutions, when youths are most in need of

resources such as clothes, money, food, and transportation. Reentry planning must take into account the persuasive pull of gangs and the needs they fulfill. Thus, discharge plans should be tailored to counter the immediate benefits of gang-involvement by ensuring gang-involved youths are rapidly attached to public benefits, social services, and employment/vocational programs that offer stipends or monetary incentives.

- c. Provide Transitional Support to Reentrants: Youths who are concerned about returning to their old neighborhood due to the influential presence of former criminal associates and the fear of reprisal for gang renunciation should receive specialized assistance. Under current policy, many of these individuals are returned to the same county in which they were arrested and placed in transitional housing, or shelters. Authorities should revisit this policy and work with gang-involved youths prior to release to create reentry plans that will support desistance from gang activity, even if that means placing youths in another neighborhood or county.
- d. Develop “Inoculation” Strategies: Authority figures, such as parole officers and police, can help insulate youth from some of the potential consequences of breaking gang ties by publically demonstrating the parolee/probationer’s conditions of release (i.e. curfew, disassociation from gangs). For instance, in Boston’s Operation Night Life program, probation and police officers frequently conduct joint patrols at night to enforce probation conditions, thus establishing their authority to enforce the mandate of gang renunciation. The NYPD working with state and local corrections agencies should explore the implementation of an Operation Night Life type program focused on East Harlem juvenile gang members being supervised in the community.

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.

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