

## **The Crime Reduction and Education Division (CRED) Program**

The CRED program was established by Pacific Centre Family Services Association (PCFSA) in August 2012 with funding from the BC Ministry of Justice. The overall goal of the program is **to prevent youth involvement in gang activity in the Capital Regional District (CRD) by providing targeted intervention and support to youth at high risk of gang involvement, youth displaying gang-related behaviours, and youth who are gang-entrenched**. Core strategies of the program include: one-on-one support plans and assessment; providing information, resources and pro-social opportunities and choices for youth participants, including a boys' group; providing support, resources and information to families and communities; coordinating and collaborating with other youth-serving agencies and actors in the community; and engaging in ongoing information-gathering through online media, walking the streets, and networking.

### **Participants have affiliations to 9 gangs in the CRD or Greater Vancouver Area:**

- *West Coast Goat Fuckers (WCGF)*
- *West Side Bloods*
- *Nortenos*
- *Indian Posse*
- *Mad Cowz*
- *Unknown Soldiers (Greater Vancouver Area)*
- *Red Scorpion (Greater Vancouver Area)*
- *The UN Gang (Greater Vancouver Area)*
- *856 (Greater Vancouver Area)*

To date, the CRED program has successfully engaged **33 youth** (30 males and 3 females) aged 9<sup>1</sup>-21 who were actively engaged in gangs, exhibiting gang-related behaviour or demonstrating risk of gang-involvement. An additional 4 male youth are currently in the referral process.

In addition to gang involvement, CRED youth participants have had a range of police contacts and involvements with the justice system, including: Robbery; Obstruction; Assault with a deadly weapon; Break and entry; Assault causing bodily harm; Mischief; Possession; Robbery with a deadly weapon; Extortion; Shoplifting; Trafficking; Uttering threats; Breaches of parole.

To date, 5 cases (3 males and 2 females) have been successfully closed. **All 3 of the males were leaders or high ranking gang members (from the West Side Bloods and the WCGF) who successfully exited their gangs as a direct result of their participation in the program.** The average length of time in the program by those who successfully exited is 10 and a half months.

The program typically receives referrals from probation, police, schools, service providers and parents or caregivers. The wait time from referral to assessment is minimal, often occurring 3 days after initial referral. The average length of time current participants in the program have been in the program is 4 months, with the longest-term participant having been in the program for 10 months and the shortest-term participant less than one month.

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<sup>1</sup> While the program aims to support youth and the typical youngest age is 13, the risk was deemed so high in the case of one 9-year old that the program included this individual in the program.

### **Top Indicators of the CRED Program's Success:**

- **The CRED Program supported the successful exit of 3 leaders and high ranking members of the West Side Bloods and the WCGF gangs.** All three have not only successfully exited their gangs, but evidence of each of their pro-social behaviours in their communities has been documented. For example, one ex-gang leader is now an active member of a community wellness committee and is regularly taking on responsibilities to support elders in his community. Coordinated responses and support to youth between agencies such as the RCMP, police and CRED staff, facilitated by program staff, is a key factor in this success.
- **Reduced police contacts, violence and gang-related behaviours have been documented for all participants in the program to date** (except for those who have been in custody for the duration of their participation, or who have been in the program for less than one month). These changes include reduced violence, pro-social behaviours, access to services, choices with respect to health or safety, increased knowledge and awareness, and improved social and emotional well being.
- **CRED Program Staff are being used by at-risk youth and their families as a community liaison to the police, and to other community services.** In May 2014, for example, one youth participant failed to report to the treatment centre where he was completing the last few months of his sentence and a Canada-wide warrant for his arrest was issued. His probation officer contacted the Mobile Youth Services Team (MYST) with an old address for him, asking them to arrest him. The CRED Coordinator who is working directly with MYST recognized his name and immediately contacted his mother. He contacted the CRED Program Coordinator 48 hours later and followed her instructions to contact his probation officer. She was then contacted by him again along with his probation officer stating that the youth was ready to turn himself in, accompanied by the CRED Coordinator.
- **The program has had a 100% retention rate and youth participant engagement and responsiveness has been high.** All youth participants maintain regular contact with program staff, with many making contact with CRED Program staff. For example, all participants of the boys' group who began in the program in the fall of 2013 have remained actively in the group and new participants have joined since that time. Even those who have relocated to other parts of BC (e.g. Burnaby Custody Centre) have consistently maintained contact with the CRED program manager.
- **Gang-entrenched youth and those at risk of entrenchment are increasingly aware of the CRED Program and see CRED staff as a reliable and safe community resource.** Staff is increasingly being contacted directly by youth and their families. The cooperation between CRED and the Mobile Youth Services Team (MYST) for Greater Victoria has been critical to increasing program visibility amongst youth on the streets.
- **The CRED Program is increasingly being viewed as a model approach to preventing and reducing youth gang-involvement.** For example, CRED Program staff member has been interviewed by the Vancouver Police Department, who has shown an interest in replicating the model.
- **The program has seen a dramatic increase in the number of referrals and participants – with a 77% increase in the number of program participants in the last quarter alone.** This is a direct reflection of increased prominence of the program in the community.

## **Key Factors Contributing to the CRED Program's Success:**

- 1. Program coordinates resources and mobilizes cooperation across community actors to provide support for youth:** The program is based on collaboration and information-sharing with wide range of community actors, including police, school boards, and a wide range of community organizations and services. While a formal wraparound approach, such as is used by the Wraparound Program in Surrey, is not possible at this time due to the lack of financial and human resources, the program has drawn from this best practice in its reliance on sharing resources, information and expertise. Collaboration and information sharing between the CRED program and the MYST for example, has directly benefited youth and both organizations. Another example of this includes the CRED Program Coordinator's collaboration with Angela Kermer of the RCMP who helped facilitate the successful exit of a youth from a leadership role in a CRD-based gang.
- 2. The program is highly responsive to its youth participants.** Despite having only one full-time staff person, the program has been able to be highly responsive. Program staff commonly meets with new youth referrals within 3 days of their initial referral, and are highly responsive, attending hearings, visiting homes, and taking youth for medical attention upon short notice.
- 3. The Program has offered support and resources to families as well as youth.** Families constitute a core aspect of a youth's support network and system. Offering support to families has strengthened youth relationships with parents and caregivers, offered much-needed resources to families and been critical in supporting youth to achieve positive outcomes in the program. Families frequently contact CRED program staff for information about the justice system and other community supports.
- 4. Boy's group has fostered leadership skills and a sense of community amongst participants:** The boys' group has been highly successful and has contributed to social and emotional well being of its participants, as well as knowledge about risks and potential alternatives to gang-related activities. Facilitators have worked to build a sense of community, belonging and safety and group participants make choices about what they would like to learn about, take on leadership roles in sharing their understanding and information with one another, and engage in community-building activities designed to build social and emotional well being.
- 5. Program focus on social and emotional well being has directly enhanced its positive outcomes:** Studies show that youth are better able to absorb information and seize new opportunities with respect to alternatives to gang-involvement, when they have high emotional and social well being. By having an emphasis on enhancing the social and emotional well being of participants, the program has been able to successfully build youth knowledge and awareness of the choices and resources available to them, and the impact of their behaviours and choices on others as well as themselves. This emphasis has also built trust between program staff and youth, contributing to the high program retention rates.

*Special Report to the Chiefs of Police for the Capital Regional District, BC  
by Rebecca Nelems, External Evaluator of the CRED Program (May 2014)*

6. **CRED Program staff and PCFSA leadership have invested in building relationships across agencies and organizations in the community – a timely pursuit given the 13 municipalities within the CRD jurisdiction.** The program staff has also frequently and actively engaged in meetings with police, community and academics about gang trends, and intervention approaches – ensuring high visibility for the CRED program while keeping abreast of latest trends.
  
7. **The program is using internationally-validated instruments to ensure a high quality assessment of both participants' vulnerability/risk-level and the quality of CRED programming,** including the internationally validated **YLS/CMI**, a quantitative screening survey of youth by Multi-Health Systems (MHS) Inc. being used by the Surrey Wraparound Project, the Search Institute's **Developmental Assets Profile (DAP)**, and the **Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA)**, developed by the Center for Youth Program Quality (CYPQ) in the US.

### **Resources are Essential to the Long-term Sustainability of the CRED Program:**

It is the CRED External Evaluator's opinion that this program represents a significant return on a minimal investment. (See for example <http://www.care2.com/causes/how-locking-kids-up-adds-to-the-cycle-of-poverty.html>) Given the financial and human resources of the program to date, its results and successes are highly significant, reflecting how effectively the program has harnessed and facilitated the coordination of expertise and resources already available in the community.

Further, while gang presence on Southern Vancouver Island is increasing and the influence of Seattle and lower mainland gangs is on the rise, no other programs such as this are available to youth in the CRD region. With the growing need and number of referrals, it is recommended that the program be expanded and current funding of the program be increased. However, at this point in time, the program does not have any funding to continue operating past the fall of 2014.

Funding to continue and/or build on the program will capitalize upon the significant investment already made by PCFSA leadership and CRED staff during the past year and a half with respect to the achievement of strong results, the growing profile of the program amongst gang-entrenched youth or youth at risk of entrenchment and their families, and increased awareness of the program amongst a range of community actors, including police, school boards, and community agencies. ***An investment in our community's youth who are most at-risk of a life of gang entrenchment is an investment in the future of our community.***

The continuation of the CRED Program will also ensure that its lessons learned about effective and successful practices at gang prevention and intervention amongst youth are captured and built upon by the wider community far beyond the CRD region.