

OJJDP's Grant-Funded Program Helps Prevent and Reduce Gang Violence in King County, WA

In King County, WA, an estimated 5,000 youth and young adults belong to approximately 90 street gangs. OJJDP's Comprehensive Gang Model is helping the county's young people who are being negatively impacted by gangs, violence, and other associated risk factors.

James (whose name has been changed for privacy) is 17 years old and lives in a suburb of Seattle. He now knows that his difficult childhood was different from other kids.

"I was moved from foster home to foster home. My brother was in a gang, my dad in prison, and mom was also doing illegal things. I followed the path I was shown. I was involved with gangs and skipping school. I didn't care about my future and was plagued with anger issues. I would be expelled from school every year until 10th grade. I spent my time in the streets fighting with gang members and authority."

Local community programs—such as the LINC: Leadership, Intervention & Change collective impact model—are intervening both before and after young people like James become involved in gang life. LINC, which is operated by the Center for Children & Youth Justice, is part of OJJDP's Comprehensive Gang Model. LINC reduces gang violence among young people, improves outcomes for young people and their families, and strengthens communities.

LINC develops positive pathways for young people by empowering youth, building collaborative community partnerships, and mobilizing community stakeholders. LINC envisions thriving, safe, and healthy communities where young people exercise self-determination free from the duress of cycles of violence.

"The goal is to work together to reduce any exposure to gang/group violence and also, hopefully, reduce or prevent involvement in the criminal or juvenile justice system," explained one LINC intervention team member. *"We hope to get them working on going to school and doing really prosocial activities."*

For James, getting connected to LINC—especially his LINC outreach worker—was pivotal.



“He didn’t just encourage me to break these habits, he showed me how. I’m not saying I left the street right away; it was a process. A 100 percent decision only I could make. After some near-death experiences, I decided. I was on my way to betterment.”

Since 2011, the Center for Children & Youth Justice and the LINC Steering Committee have replicated this model throughout King County. They used school district boundaries to define the program area and make it the first regional implementation of OJJDP’s Comprehensive Gang Model in the country. In 2015, three geographically focused LINC intervention teams began coordinating services for gang-involved or affected King County young people through specialized multidisciplinary teams. The teams encompass street outreach workers, case managers, probation counselors, school representatives, behavioral health specialists, law enforcement officers, and employment providers.

The LINC intervention teams’ approach has helped King County’s young people successfully distance themselves from the gang lifestyle. Throughout the years of his participation, James developed a strong bond with LINC intervention team members who provided him with the resources to help him leave gang life behind and change his behavior.

“Now I am attending school every day, filling out job applications, I have recently completed driver’s ed, and I am on track to graduate high school on time,” James said.

LINC is a long-term intervention program with young people enrolled in services for 9 to 24 months. The LINC intervention teams coordinate services for up to 250 young people per program year. Since their launch in 2015, LINC intervention teams have received more than 500 referrals and provided coordinated services to nearly 400 gang-involved or at-risk young people across King County.

For more information about the LINC program, visit www.ccyj.org or email YouthLINC@ccyj.org.