



Abbotsford Youth Crime Prevention Project

The Abbotsford Youth Crime Prevention Project works with two distinct groups of youth in Abbotsford, British Columbia. The first are street entrenched, sexually exploited or homeless youth at risk of gang and criminal involvement. The second are South Asian youth who are at risk of joining or who already participate in gangs, gang like behaviour and/or criminal activity. The project fosters youth crime prevention through an integrated approach, mentoring and outreach services for them and their families. The Abbotsford Youth Crime Prevention Project is supported by [Public Safety Canada](#), National Crime Prevention Centre's [Crime Prevention Action Fund](#) and is delivered by [Abbotsford Community Services](#) through South Asian Community Resource Office (SACRO) and Wrapping Abbotsford Youth with Support (WAYS) program within the Youth Resources Centre (YRC). The SACRO provides services for youth in the South Asian community, and the YRC provides services for youth involved in or at risk of sexual exploitation, drug abuse, gang involvement, or homelessness. The project began in April, 2009 and will be piloted and evaluated through June 30, 2012.

Abbotsford Police Department statistics suggest that crimes against persons (which include violent crimes) increased by 13% in 2008.¹ More specifically, there have been four gang related homicides involving firearms in the community since March of 2009, including the double murder of two local high school students on May 2, 2009.² After Regina and Saskatoon, Abbotsford has the third highest crime rate of all Canadian cities.³ Geographically, Abbotsford is now the fifth largest city in the province of BC and a satellite city of Vancouver.

The Abbotsford Police Department asserts that rapid urbanization is a major catalyst for emerging youth crime, including increased property crimes and violent crimes.⁴ Statistics show a strong correlation between street-entrenched youth and crime in the area. As many as 50 youth per night are unsupervised or homeless and many are involved in the drug or sex trades. The McCreary Centre report, "Against the Odds: A profile of Marginalized and Street-involved Youth in British Columbia" indicates that of the youth surveyed: 24% reported drug dealing or running; 14% reported involvement in theft; 5% reported involvement in the sex trade; and, 31% reported involvement in other illegal activities (such as panhandling and busking).⁵

The South Asian community in Abbotsford has also identified youth gangs as a serious concern and South Asian youth living in the Abbotsford area are becoming disproportionately involved in gang activity⁶. Anecdotal and media accounts continue to highlight issues of social maladjustment, intra-family conflict, generational issues, gang activities, and violence in the South-Asian community of Abbotsford. The BC Integrated Gang Task Force (2006) found an exceptionally high rate of gun violence among South-Asian youth. Totten (2007)⁷ noted that there are between ten to twenty South Asian gangs in the lower mainland of BC including the Fraser Valley, where Abbotsford is located, and Surrey with the highest immigrant South Asian populations. Many South Asian gangs

Abbotsford Youth Crime Prevention Project

are involved in trafficking marijuana, cocaine and heroin and these gangs have been linked with incidents of extreme violence, including numerous murders involving South Asian youth (18 to 35 year olds) in the BC Lower Mainland in the last three years.

The Abbotsford Youth Crime Prevention Project provides much needed services. It is based on an integrated planning framework that includes outreach, education, support, referrals, and community involvement/consultations. The need for these approaches was identified by the community through extensive consultation, and through two distinct needs assessments completed in the last two years.

The Evidence Base

The Abbotsford Youth Crime Prevention Project is based on evidence from the [Milwaukee Wraparound](#) program and includes a specific mentoring component.

Wraparound Milwaukee

Wraparound Milwaukee is an integrated care program that focuses on delivering strength-based, individualized care to delinquent youth and their families. It was designed to reduce the number of youth being institutionalized by providing family-based treatment and programs within the community. The program targets youth ages 13 to 17 with serious emotional, behavioural, and mental health needs and their families.

The goals of Wraparound Milwaukee are:

- reduce anti-social behaviour;
- help families access available services;
- increase association with pro-social peers;
- increase family cohesion; and
- minimize out-of-home placements.

Evaluation has demonstrated that youth who received interventions from Wraparound Milwaukee had a significant reduction in recidivism rates. They had a significant decrease in felony referrals, misdemeanour referrals. They also committed fewer sex offences, property offences, assault offences, and weapons offences.⁸

Mentoring

Mentoring is a process that focuses on relationships to teach, impart, or institute changes in behaviours or attitudes. When well implemented, mentoring can be a useful strategy with at-risk youth who experience multiple risk factors for delinquency, such as few positive role models, few opportunities for community or after-school activities and poor school performance.⁹ The approach assumes that by creating pro-social attachments, commitment to socially appropriate goals, and involvement in conventional activities, youth will be less likely to engage in delinquent behaviours because they have more to lose from the negative consequences of crime.¹⁰

Program Participants

The project works with participants who are 1) street entrenched, homeless, sexually exploited or 2) South Asian. All the youth are between the ages of 15 and 19, living in the Abbotsford area and are engaged in, or at risk of engaging in, criminal and/or gang activity. Parents/guardians of the youth participants are also involved in the project.

Program Components

Youth participants are identified through self-referrals or referrals from family, police, and/or community members. The main criteria for youth to be referred to the project include: 1) youth are already in a gang and want to get out; 2) they are at risk of getting involved in a gang or criminal activity; 3) they are at risk of becoming or are already involved in street activities, sexual exploitation, or homelessness. Abbotsford Community Services implements an intake assessment process to determine the risk levels of potential youth participants. Youth who exhibit complex risk

Abbotsford Youth Crime Prevention Project

profiles are supported through individual wraparound plans that are developed in consultation with the participants and their families. Youth who present risk factors, but do not meet the criteria for the development of the individual wraparound plans, receive some services through the project, including outreach, mentoring and access to recreation opportunities.

Each wraparound plan is unique depending on the needs of the participant and the plan is developed and implemented by a team of support staff. Each team member assists the youth in recognizing and building on their individual strengths by setting and achieving goals. Some examples of activities and interventions included are:

- Assistance to overcome or reduce the damage caused by alcohol and other drug dependencies through access to addictions counseling, family counseling, and individual counseling;
- Access to positive recreational activities such as intra-mural sports, cultural dancing classes and aerobics;
- Outreach support to youth and their families - available all day including evenings and weekends;
- Family support services and parenting/relationship building to learn more about factors putting youth at risk, help develop strategic plans for the youth and assist with effective monitoring of youth progress;
- Supports to keep youth in school, bring youth back into school, and explore opportunities for post-secondary education; and
- Life skills work to learn about building positive relationships and patterns of interaction with mentors, family members and pro-social peers.

The project also includes a community component that builds informal social control by helping neighbours and other community members learn how to intervene effectively when they see youth congregating, not attending school or behaving inappropriately. A Community Youth and Family Facilitator (CYFF) works with people in the community to identify strategies that can be developed and implemented to increase protective factors and help South Asian and street entrenched/homeless youth steer away from negative choices.

A mentoring component is also included in the project, which helps meet the individual needs of each participant. Mentors engage youth in positive activities such as sports, provide tutoring support, demonstrate and coach life skills, take youth to social events or sometimes just talk over coffee.

Key Partners

Many community partners are involved in the project activities. Some of the key organizations include:

- The City of Abbotsford
- Abbotsford Police Department
- Abbotsford School District #34 (including secondary school administrators and the school district transitions teacher)
- Mennonite Central Committee: Employment and Community Development BC
- CYRUS Centre
- Fraser House Youth Alcohol and Drug Society
- British Columbia (Abbotsford) Ministry of Children and Family Development
- Abbotsford Youth Commission
- Youth For Christ
- Adolescent Crisis Response Program
- Fraser Valley Youth Association
- STOLO/Xyolhemeylh Child and Family Services
- Abbotsford and Mission Child and Youth Committees
- Fraser Valley Community Action Team against sexual exploitation

Abbotsford Youth Crime Prevention Project

Evaluation Design

A comprehensive evaluation of the project is being conducted by a third party evaluator. The purpose of the evaluation is to thoroughly document the Abbotsford Youth Crime Prevention Project implementation and impacts in order to contribute to the knowledge of what project components work best to prevent or reduce gang involvement.

The evaluation will include: data from participant's needs assessments, participant and family interviews, focus groups, questionnaires, and stakeholder interviews (including community members, schools, service providers, police and advisory committee members), review of police reports/files, and school/activity attendance sheets.

Implementation Observations

Information Availability

The extent to which statistical information can be supplied from either the police or the school board regarding youth clients is unclear. Some youth will have little or no contact with the Abbotsford School District and therefore little information exists to help understand their environment and history. Continual discussion, sharing of information and working with protocols and within the parameters of privacy legislation is important for success.

Staff Training

Providing training and continual development opportunities for staff is very important for success. Working with street-entrenched youth is dynamic and complex and any opportunities for training in formal methods such as the Wraparound approach or more information knowledge exchanges with others is sought out by the project sponsors.

Intensive Assessment

It is important for youth that action takes place quickly to meet some of their pressing needs. While it is critical to the success of the project to undertake an intensive assessment period in order to develop personal plans with the best chances of success, project staff are finding that unless some services are offered quickly, youth will be more reluctant to undergo the intense assessment. The intensive assessment includes the Youth Level Service / Case Management Inventory (YLS/CMI) as well as an extensive genogram for the youth's family history of three generations.

Multiple-Approaches to Servicing Youth, Families and the Community

The sponsoring organization is implementing and delivering the project, but is maintaining relationships with a range of organizations, including law enforcement to provide project services to youth, families and the community.

For more information on this project please contact:

Executive Director
Abbotsford Community Services
2420 Montrose Avenue
Abbotsford, British Columbia
V2S 3S9

Public Safety Canada
National Crime Prevention Centre
British Columbia Region
260 - 858 Beatty Street
Vancouver, BC V6B 1C1

Abbotsford Youth Crime Prevention Project

¹ Abbotsford Police Department. 2006. *Comprehensive Police Report: Executive Summary*.

[http://72.14.253.104/search?q=cache:HvwYwvaxx10J:abbotsfordpolice.org/misc/plan/CPPExecSummary.doc+Youth+crime+A¹MCAWS.\(No+Date\).Profile+of+Immigrants+in+BC+Communities,+2001,+Abbotsford.+Downloaded+June+15,+2004+from+http://www.profiles.mcaaws.gov.bc.ca/Community_Profiles/profiles/Immigration%20Profiles/Abbotsford.pdf](http://72.14.253.104/search?q=cache:HvwYwvaxx10J:abbotsfordpolice.org/misc/plan/CPPExecSummary.doc+Youth+crime+A¹MCAWS.(No+Date).Profile+of+Immigrants+in+BC+Communities,+2001,+Abbotsford.+Downloaded+June+15,+2004+from+http://www.profiles.mcaaws.gov.bc.ca/Community_Profiles/profiles/Immigration%20Profiles/Abbotsford.pdf).

² For more information please visit: <http://www.cbc.ca/canada/british-columbia/story/2009/05/02/bc-abbotsford-bodies-identified.html>

³ The Sun Times. 2007. National Crime Rate Down but Youth Crime Up: Teens accused of murder at highest rate since 1961

⁴ Abbotsford Police Department. 2006. *Comprehensive Police Report: Executive Summary*.

[http://72.14.253.104/search?q=cache:HvwYwvaxx10J:abbotsfordpolice.org/misc/plan/CPPExecSummary.doc+Youth+crime+A⁴MCAWS.\(No+Date\).Profile+of+Immigrants+in+BC+Communities,+2001,+Abbotsford.+Downloaded+June+15,+2004+from+http://www.profiles.mcaaws.gov.bc.ca/Community_Profiles/profiles/Immigration%20Profil](http://72.14.253.104/search?q=cache:HvwYwvaxx10J:abbotsfordpolice.org/misc/plan/CPPExecSummary.doc+Youth+crime+A⁴MCAWS.(No+Date).Profile+of+Immigrants+in+BC+Communities,+2001,+Abbotsford.+Downloaded+June+15,+2004+from+http://www.profiles.mcaaws.gov.bc.ca/Community_Profiles/profiles/Immigration%20Profil)

⁵ Smith, A., Saewyc, E., Albert, M., Mackay, L., & Northcott, M. (2007). *Against the Odds: A Profile of Marginalized and Street-Involved Youth in B.C.* Vancouver, B.C.: McCreary Centre Society.

⁶ For more information contact the project sponsor.

⁷ Totten, M. (September 19, 2007). Youth Gangs: A general overview and quality prevention and intervention strategies. MPSSSG Addressing Youth Gang Violence Seminar, Surrey, B.C.

⁸ For more information visit: <http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/res/cp/res/2008-pcpp-eng.aspx>

⁹ Thornton, Timothy N., Carole A. Craft, Linda L. Dahlberg, Barbara S. Lynch and Katie Baer. 2002. *Best Practices of Youth Violence Prevention: a Sourcebook for Community Action*. Revised version. Atlanta, Georgia: Division of Violence Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Available from: www.cdc.gov/ncipc/dvp/bestpractices.htm

¹⁰ For more information visit <http://www2.dsqonline.com/mpg/search.aspx>