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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, IRVINE

Life on the Line: An Exploration of Street Outreach and Gang Prevention and Intervention Work  
in Los Angeles

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements  
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in Criminology, Law and Society

by

Charlotte E. Bradstreet

Dissertation Committee:  
Professor Elliott P. Currie, Ph.D., Chair  
Professor Emeritus James Diego Vigil, Ph.D.  
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2015



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- Scott, D., Bradstreet, C., Maxson C., Omori, M., & Reed, S. (2011). *The Complexities of Youth Gangs in Juvenile Institutions. (In Progress)*
- Turner, S., Bradstreet, C., & Hess, J. (2010). *Risk Assessment with California Offenders: Using the California Static Risk Assessment Instrument to Measure Conviction Recidivism.* Report submitted to CDCR.
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- Bradstreet, C. *United Against the “Stronghold of Murder”*: A Case study of community collaboration and gang prevention. Presentation at the American Society of Criminology, Atlanta, GA, November 2013.
- Bradstreet, C. *When Worlds Collide: A Qualitative Study of Citywide Gang Prevention & Intervention Service Coordination.* Presentation at the American Society of Criminology, Chicago, IL, November 2012.
- Bradstreet, C., Grebenkemper, J., Haerle, D., & Maxson, C. *Toward an Expanded Definition of ‘Treatment’: How are services related to misconduct?* Presentation at the American Society of Criminology, Washington, D.C., November 2011.
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- 2014 Paul and Frances Dickman Award for Community Engagement (\$1,500)
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- 2010 – Present American Society of Criminology
- 2010 – Present Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences
- 2002 – Present Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society

#### PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

McRory Pediatric Services, Encino CA

2007-2008

*Floortime Therapist*

- Developed and implemented individualized behavioral intervention treatment plans for children with developmental disabilities
- Evaluated skills in the areas of shared attention, engagement, two-way purposeful interaction, complex problem solving, representational play and elaboration of ideas, and abstract and critical thinking
- Served as a consultant to families and classroom teachers as needed to incorporate target goals into the home and school environments as needed for generalization of skills

United Friends of the Children, Los Angeles, CA

2006-2007

*Advocacy Counselor*

- Maintained a caseload of emancipated foster care youth in an enriched-services transitional housing program

- Provided advocacy and counseling services, independent living skills training, and ongoing personal support to youth pursuing a successful transition into independent adulthood
- Facilitated youths' participation in educational mentoring and assistance services, onsite mental health therapy and substance abuse counseling, and career development and guidance programs

United States Probation – Central District of California  
2005-2006

*United States Probation Officer*

- Supervised a caseload of adult federal offenders to ensure adherence to Court-ordered conditions, reduce risk to the community, and provide appropriate correctional treatment
- Maintained regular contact with offenders through both face-to-face visits and via telephone to investigate employment/sources of income, lifestyle, and associates for the purpose of assessing risk and compliance factors
- Detected and investigated violations, implemented appropriate alternatives and sanctions, reported violations to the appropriate authorities, and made recommendations for disposition

Office of the Attorney General for the District of Columbia, Washington, DC  
2004-2005

*Victim Witness Program Specialist*

- Assisted in the conceptualization, development, and implementation of a prosecutor-based Victim Services Program
- Offered short-term crisis counseling and conducted sensitive needs assessment interviews of victims and witnesses to determine appropriate referral sources
- Collaborated with prosecution and other law-enforcement entities as well as social service agencies and organizations to assist victims and witnesses to obtain necessary services

Salvation Army – Youth Services, Syracuse NY  
2003

*Outreach Case Manager*

- Collaborated with probation and other social service agencies to target and recruit at-risk youth participants
- Conducted Intake Assessments of gang-associated or affiliated adolescents to determine level of risk and need of appropriate services
- Coordinated services for program participants including job preparation and placement, family support services, case work, and street outreach

New Life Homes – Snell Farm Incorporated, Bath, NY  
2001-2002

*Resident Supervisor*

Bath, NY

- Supervised adolescent males who were either non-adjudicated or court-adjudicated as juvenile delinquents for sexual offenses and were mandated for treatment at a residential treatment facility in a rural working farm setting
- Developed daily program activities to respond to each resident's needs and interests while complementing and reinforcing treatment goals

- Assisted residents in adhering to their respective treatment plans and in achieving personal goals in order to equip them with appropriate concepts and skills necessary to make positive choices and return successfully to their families and home communities

## **ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION**

Life on the Line: An Exploration of Street Outreach and Gang Prevention and Intervention Work  
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by

Charlotte E. Bradstreet

Doctor of Philosophy in Criminology, Law and Society

University of California, Irvine, 2015

Professor Elliott P. Currie, Ph.D., Chair

In spite of overall crime declines, gang violence remains a serious problem in many large cities. This is particularly true in Los Angeles, where youth are five times more likely to be in street gangs compared to their counterparts living elsewhere. Agencies use a variety of approaches to combat the gang problem. Research indicates these methods include various suppression, program, and street outreach efforts, and there is certain rhetoric about the importance of collaboration across various entities in these endeavors. What is less explicit in the literature is a discussion of how gang prevention and intervention work, particularly that driven by street outreach organizations and individuals, actually occurs in practice. This project is a qualitative case study of one such effort in Los Angeles. Using participant observation and in-depth, semi-structured interviews, this study provides a close look at who these street outreach interventionists are; the types of tasks they perform on a daily basis and the ways they interact with other key players in this effort; the individual qualities necessary to carry out these responsibilities; the obstacles and challenges to prevention and intervention work; the host of

identified needs for the continuation and expansion of street outreach efforts; and various implications of these findings.

## **Chapter 1. Background**

A number of organizations hope to combat the gang problem in Los Angeles as well as in other cities across the nation. Various law enforcement agencies, nonprofits, child protective and foster care agencies, mental health agencies and school-based programs have offered outreach and gang prevention and intervention services for at-risk youth. In spite of well-intentioned individuals and agencies, effective services for this target population are few and far between (Klein & Maxson, 2006; Cordon, Haapanen, Harris, & Bederian-Gardner, 2009). Limited resources, a wide variety of interventions without a common vision, and no formal evaluation of efficacy conspire to produce little concrete knowledge about how best to tackle the problem of gang violence. What results is a patchwork of fragmented service delivery organizations and uncertain outcomes.

To date, there is no widely implemented model for how to coordinate citywide gang prevention and intervention efforts. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention poses one such model, the Comprehensive Gang Model, as a “flexible framework” that can help guide cities in assessing the gang problem and implementing a corresponding mix of prevention, intervention, and suppression strategies to combat gang violence (OJJDP 2010), but it is somewhat unclear how the collaboration process is to occur. In particular, the literature does not provide a clear picture of how these strategies are implemented at the ground level. The nature of unifying various agencies for the purpose of service delivery is complex and the literature that addresses this issue does not explicitly describe how this process unfolds. This project is an analysis of one such effort in Los Angeles, designed to explore the complex dynamics involved in unifying existing intervention agencies to prevent violence and specifically to shed light on street outreach efforts.

There are more than 450 known street gangs in the City of Los Angeles with roughly 45,000 active members (Johnson, 2010; The Los Angeles Police Department: Gangs, 2012). Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) data indicate that, compared to youth living elsewhere in the United States, youth living in Los Angeles are five times more likely to be a member of a street gang (The Los Angeles Police Department: Gangs, 2012). Since gang members are known for participating in some of the most violent and dangerous forms of criminal activity, the prevalence of gang affiliation among Los Angeles youth is troubling. In the early 2000s, deeply distressed by the extent of the gang violence problem and its impact on Los Angeles city youth, a proponent of community activism and change founded a nonprofit organization in an effort to combat gang violence and improve the conditions of Los Angeles communities. This organization, which I will call Partnership for Advocacy and Community Empowerment (hereafter, PACE),<sup>1</sup> is designed to coordinate existing outreach services in several target communities across Los Angeles. It emphasizes the importance of empowering communities from within by providing financial support and training community members whose life experiences and expertise may inform effective intervention (for example, former gang members).

This nonprofit agency facilitated collaboration between law enforcement and former gang members in an effort to reduce gang violence in several target neighborhoods. This process was gradual as these two groups built working relationships and the outreach workers learned to cooperate with one other. Over the past decade, PACE has become a collaborating partner with seven nonprofit street outreach organizations; this process was mostly made possible through word of mouth referrals and relationship building. For the past four years, it has engaged in

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<sup>1</sup> All names of organizations and individuals are pseudonyms to ensure research subject confidentiality.

focused fundraising efforts, established a board of directors, and worked to ensure that all collaborating organizations are legally operating as nonprofits.

One goal of PACE and its collaborating organizations is to increase the professionalism and capacity of street outreach work in Los Angeles communities. This requires training in and adherence to evidence-based practices in the area of community and gang violence prevention and intervention. It also necessitates program development, implementation, and evaluation. There exists a tension, however, between those with academic and professional training who emphasize the importance of utilizing empirical research in this process and those who rely more heavily on personal experience and evidence that is more anecdotal in nature. Though the group members say they are committed to incorporating both of these valuable components, it is an ongoing and negotiated process. PACE and its partner organizations are in the beginning stages of this process of establishing a more formalized system of collaboration, and the long-term goal is to develop a successful model that can be utilized in other cities with similar gang and violence issues.

### **Significance of the Study**

This dissertation research project is an empirical case study of a collaborative effort in Los Angeles that purports to be an innovative, ground-up approach to community empowerment and service coordination which unites a host of community partners in an effort to strengthen communities from within. This research is a culturally sensitive exploration of the meaning of collaboration, how it occurs, and its impact on gang prevention and intervention. It also explores the nature of prevention and intervention work on the ground level in these target communities. A limited body of research addresses collaboration in the field of social services, but it does not focus on gang prevention and intervention specifically. Additionally, though it is often said that

coordinated service delivery should yield better outcomes than disconnected or individual services (Arciaga, 2007), this is often a common sense notion rather than a theoretically based assumption. Further, the literature is typically quite vague about how collaboration actually happens and who drives the process as it plays out in a real-life setting. This project reveals that in this instance, street outreach workers are most centrally responsible for the gang prevention and intervention efforts in their respective communities. This study is a unique contribution to the literature, as it provides an in-depth look at how a collaboration effort is formed and implemented to address gang violence. This involves identifying the key players and how they locate and reach out to each other, examining power and communication dynamics, discussing barriers, challenges, and conflict resolution, and exploring their own ‘on the ground’ understanding of ‘what works’ to prevent violence. To date, this type of insider perspective on the nuances of a real-world collaboration to combat gang violence, specifically as it pertains to the responsibilities of street outreach workers, does not exist.

The current case study is informed in part by a body of literature that addresses organizational structure and collaboration and seeks to build additional grounded theory about the process, dynamics, and outcomes of street outreach collaboration specifically as it pertains to gang prevention and intervention and community empowerment. The body of literature that provides context for the current project includes information on what we know about gangs; common responses to what has been described as a gang problem, including suppression tactics and programs; literature on organizational structure and collaboration; and street outreach efforts, including a well-known attempt to collaborate for community improvement and delinquency prevention.

## **Literature Review**

### **What do we know about gangs?**

Gangs have emerged in several waves in each region of the United States. Howell (2015) gives a history of gang activity and development: First, in the Northeast, gangs emerged in three waves during a time of social and political unrest that allowed a subculture of organized crime to flourish. Between 1783-1860s, gangs were comprised of impoverished European immigrants, and the first gangs were poor, Irish immigrants in New York City. From the 1860s-1930s, an additional influx of European immigrants, as well as Asian immigrants, fueled the growth of gangs. Between the 1930s-1980s, Black and Latino gangs also developed, and juvenile and female gangs became more prevalent. Secondly, in the Midwest, specifically, Chicago, the gang emergence patterns closely followed those of the Northeast but had more significant racial/ethnic divisions. From the 1860s-1920s, gangs in the Midwest were predominantly White immigrants. From the 1920s-1940s, gangs began to engage in more organized crime activities, and Black gangs began to emerge after the 1919 race riot. Between the 1940s-1980s, Black and Mexican gangs developed in the midst of escalating interracial conflict. Thirdly, in the Western region, the first wave of gang development was between the 1890s-1930s and was comprised of Mexican-American individuals. Between the 1940s-1950s, Mexican immigration was most prevalent in Los Angeles, and along with this came a surge in gang development and violence in this city. From the 1950s-1980s, the growth of Black gangs in Los Angeles mirrored that of Chicago. Lastly, gangs emerged much later in the South than in the other regions. From the 1930s-1960s, there was fairly minimal gang activity, and that which did exist was mainly comprised of Mexican immigrants and then the Ku Klux Klan. Between the 1970s-1990s, gang activity became most prevalent within the Hispanic/Latino and Asian populations (Howell, 2015).

According to the National Youth Gang Survey (NYGS), which has been conducted annually by the National Gang Center since 1996 and reports gang prevalence and characteristics across the country, gang prevalence decreased during the late 1990s and then began gradually increasing in 2001. Not surprisingly, the gang problem is most significant in larger cities, and it is also in these areas that the gang problem is the most chronic and persistent over time. Homicide is used as the main indicator of serious gang activity in the NYGS, and for cities that participated in the Survey with populations of 100,000 or more, about 25% of all homicides in 2009 were gang-related. Chicago and Los Angeles data were kept separate because these cities have historically had notoriously high numbers of gang-related killings. The data indicate that roughly one-third of homicides in Chicago and about one half of homicides in Los Angeles were gang-related in 2009 (Howell et al., 2011).

A review of gang literature from the 1980s onward tells us that for the most part, males join gangs at higher rates than their female counterparts, but enough females join that we cannot simply ignore female membership or association. Also, there are evident racial differences; both black and Hispanic youth join gangs at higher rates than white youth (Klein & Maxson, 2006). The evidence indicates that gang members commit more crimes than those not involved with gangs, and they are also more likely to have an arrest or multiple arrests. Much research demonstrates that both victimization and offending rates are about equally associated with gang membership (Klein & Maxson, 2006; Freng & Winfree, 2004; Miller, J., 2001; Vigil, 2002). Gang youth are often disadvantaged in a variety of ways, or experience what researchers refer to as “multiple marginality,” in that they face a host of challenges at the “ecological, economic, socio-cultural, and psychological” levels (Conchas & Vigil, 2013). This indicates a need for targeted intervention strategies in each of these arenas.

## **What do we do about gangs?**

*Suppression and programs.* Research indicates a host of negative outcomes exist for gang members and associates including family dysfunction, drug problems, and employment issues and financial instability (Hagedorn, 1988; Moore, 1991; Thornberry et al., 2003), but the main purpose and focus of gang programs and gang control policy as a whole is gang crime reduction, especially violent gang crime (Klein & Maxson, 2006; Joe, K., 1993). Gangs also contribute to a perception of high crime and increase fear of crime regardless of the level of crime in their respective communities and these fears may be exacerbated by increased gang suppression measures implemented by law enforcement (Lane & Meeker, 2003; Lane, 2002). According to Katz and Webb (2003), police departments often form special gang units in response to political pressure rather than specific gang problems, and with little accountability to the respective police forces or communities, these efforts do not prove to be effective (see also Green & Pranis, 2007). Suppression efforts including increased patrolling of particular areas, stop and search tactics, neighborhood sweeps, targeting gang leaders or certain members, and enforcing gang injunctions often increase gang cohesion and activity as well as create tension in the community due to racial profiling and other forms of police misconduct. The implication here is that people could be made to feel safer if policy makers invested in strengthening ties within the community instead of emphasizing gang suppression (Greene & Pranis, 2007; Klein & Maxson, 2006).

Overwhelmingly, the research exploring our response to youth gang violence over the past several decades concludes that suppression and program efforts have not worked. Though there are promising strategies or frameworks that have some demonstrated effectiveness in a few cities, implementation varies across programs and locales. For example, the Comprehensive

Gang Prevention, Intervention, and Suppression Model (CGPM) has produced some positive effects, but these vary based on whether stakeholders agree on the existence of a gang problem and commit to addressing it together (Howell, 2015). Studies in the 1990s indicated that most gang prevention and intervention programs had not been evaluated (Sherman, Gottfredson, MacKenzie, Eck, Reuter, & Bushway, 1997) and those that had did not appear to have the desired effects on gang violence (Howell, 1998; Spergel, 1995). Klein and Maxson (2006) reviewed six major multi-million dollar gang control programs that included various prevention, intervention, and suppression efforts and had been evaluated and concluded that they were failures either in implementation or in program effects.

The programs in this review were all based on conventional wisdom about what was needed rather than on theory or empirical research (Klein & Maxson, 2006). The L.A. Plan focused primarily on “cracking down” on gangs, and its program components were not independently evaluated. The G.R.E.A.T. program, which was similar to D.A.R.E. in that it was a prevention program based in schools and implemented by law enforcement officers (but rather than targeting drug use was designed to reduce gang joining), was implemented with integrity, but initial evaluations showed no effects. However, it should be noted that a second national evaluation indicates that this program reduced the odds of gang joining by 39% and increased prosocial attitudes, thereby meeting two of its three program goals and suggesting its utility as a prevention effort when used in a larger community-based gang prevention and intervention context (Esbensen, Peterson, Taylor, and Osgood, 2011). The Illinois Gang Crime Prevention Center applied juvenile delinquency notions – specifically the idea that the things that reduce general juvenile delinquency should also be effective in youth gang reduction – to the gang crime problem, but its pilot programs failed to target the most at-risk population and there was a

lack of integrity in program implementation. The L.A. Bridges program failed to pay adequate attention to gang-specific issues and did not have gang-relevant evaluations. Implementation of the Spergel Model, a comprehensive gang control program with elements of prevention, intervention, and suppression, was affected by both collaboration difficulties and competing interests that made the Model something of a “moving target;” the result was a lack of strong program effects. Finally, the SafeFutures program, which was based upon the Spergel Model, yielded no positive program effects.

The conclusions and implications of this review of failed programs are that we must move beyond conventional wisdom about what works or is needed and: 1) use differential targeting that is based on risk factors; 2) identify varying forms of gang subcultures and address these; 3) intervene in pivotal group processes; 4) address community contexts, and 5) design and implement gang prevention and intervention programs that can be evaluated over time (Klein & Maxson, 2006).

***Organization and collaboration.*** To date, there is no widely implemented, explicit model or promising program for gang prevention and intervention other than perhaps the OJJDP’s Comprehensive Gang Model, and there is no widely utilized system for citywide collaboration addressing gang issues. On a broad scale, one of the biggest challenges for collaboration is that it must occur on some kind of systemic level, often across agencies with varying interests and involvement. According to Decker and colleagues, (2002), unwillingness to share clients and other “turf” concerns can create significant conflict. There is a body of literature that addresses issues of organizational structure and collaboration, and this will provide a framework for examining how law enforcement entities, street outreach workers, interested community members, researchers, and practitioners work together to establish citywide collaboration

addressing the issue of gang violence. Some literature focuses on collaboration in social services more generally, and a smaller body of research addresses collaboration as it pertains to gangs and youth crime prevention more specifically.

According to Wood and Gray (1991), in the *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, there are two special journal issues that focus on collaboration. This research is less explicitly related to collaboration for delinquency prevention but addresses the definition, theory, and sustainability of collaboration. These articles identify theoretical questions pertaining to collaboration and use these questions to develop a theory of collaboration. These authors suggest that the theoretical perspectives that explain collaborative behavior include resource dependence, corporate social performance and institutional economics, strategic management and social ecology, microeconomics, institutional and negotiated order, and political factors. They note that the following three main considerations must be made in the development of comprehensive collaboration theory: What does collaboration mean? How does collaboration occur, and what is the role of intervention in directing social change? What is the impact of environmental complexity and control over the environment? What is the organizational self-interest vs. the collective self-interest?

A review of the literature reveals many definitions of collaboration (Wood & Gray, 1991). These researchers combine each of these definitions to expand on Gray's (1989) ideas and propose the following definition: "Collaboration occurs when a group of autonomous stakeholders of a problem domain engage in an interactive process, using shared rules, norms, and structures, to act or decide on issues related to that domain." This definition is broad enough to include many types of collaborations but specific enough to exclude "collective forms" which are not true collaborations.

In their discussion of how collaboration occurs and the role of the convener, Wood and Gray (1991) state that conveners behave differently, based on the type of influence they have over stakeholders. This depends on the type of intervention and whether the convener took initiative or the stakeholders requested that he or she convene. These scholars note that conveners who are asked to fill this role by stakeholders are in a different “sociological position” than those who take the initial step into this role and establish collaboration. Further, if only some of the stakeholders are at the table of the collaborative effort, this has implications for outcomes.

These scholars indicate that the final two ingredients in developing a theory of collaboration are the consideration of whether the given collaboration has the desired impact on the environment and the balance between individual versus collective interest. They emphasize the need for resource dependence and managing interdependency by collaborating. In controlling resource dependency, the collaboration can become more efficient. It is not easy to separate the individual and collective interests because serving the stakeholders’ interests should be “contingent on mutual action”; there is a shared overall purpose and achieving this can fulfill both individual organization and collective interests simultaneously (Wood & Gray, 1991).

Osborne and Murray (2000) examined a social services collaboration effort in Canada and tested whether a conceptual approach is useful for understanding how collaboration works with voluntary and non-profit organizations (VNPOs). They explain that there are five stages of collaboration and for collaboration to be sustained, the process must be successful at each stage including: 1) pre-contact; 2) preliminary contact; 3) negotiating; 4) implementation; and 5) evaluation. Additionally, they highlight four types of factors that affect successful collaboration:

collaboration type, organization characteristics, the way in which collaboration development and implementation takes place, and the environmental and contextual factors.

These scholars found that little data existed for the pre-contact stage but that during the preliminary contact stage, all agencies worked together and began to build trust (Osborne & Murray, 2000). During the negotiating stage, which was made more fluid by all the trust built in the previous stage, organizations recognized the benefit of collaborating – everybody wins – over competing – funding gets cut for someone. Also, the organizations saw the need to develop outcome evaluation expertise and management of these evaluations. Perhaps more relevant to the current study, a tension did exist at this stage as one CEO stated:

How did we cope? Well of course there were tensions between collaboration and competition. We had to be open about this and up front. We all knew competition would be our undoing, but it wasn't always easy. We used jokes a lot to bring things into the open and to defuse them... (Osborne & Murray, 2000).

During the implementation stage, the most critical component was defining organizational boundaries of the collaboration; each entity needed to know its role. Ultimately, during the evaluation and continuity stage, the organizations decided to continue working together because all involved were satisfied with the outcomes.

Okamoto's (2001) study explores interagency collaboration between state and private agencies working with gang youth who have been classified as high risk. The main findings included the following: 1) The primary purpose of collaborating is to provide better services to youth by capitalizing on varied practitioner expertise; 2) communication and cooperation are critical elements to successful collaboration; and 3) the most common negative agency behaviors that hinder collaboration include diffusion of responsibility, blaming, withholding information,

hiding or covering up mistakes, and premature termination of the arrangement. These behaviors were generally the result of “agency fear” of investing resources in the high-risk gang youth target population. Okamoto (2001) concludes that systematic change is needed to reduce fear-based behaviors, including system reform, administrative support of practitioners, and working relationships between practitioners.

Takahashi and Smutny (2001) study collaboration in small, community-based organizations. They situate their work within the context of organizational management and business and planning research. The relevant literature highlights specific challenges of building and maintaining collaboration efforts. For instance, partnering community-based organizations risk being controlled by stakeholders (Hardy and Phillips, 1998; Lauria, 1982). Other institutional concerns include lack of stable, long-term funding (Penner, 1995), personnel problems and lack of functional organization (Fleisher, 1991), and high staff turnover rates (Penner, 1995). According to Bazzoli (1997), the elements necessary for collaboration include an environment conducive to forming partnerships, an identified need to collaborate, and willing and able partnering organizations.

Based on their case study of the HIV Wellness Collaborative, which was comprised of three community-based organizations that formed a partnership to offer services to people with HIV and AIDS, Takahashi and Smutny (2001) indicate that the major areas of concern for collaboration include: 1) the form of the collaborative, or the degree of formality vs. informality of the structure; and 2) the function of the collaborative, or the degree of independence or dependence in the partners’ respective tasks. More formal structures emphasize linkages between organizations and more informal structures emphasize the importance of relationships between the key players involved. Independence in the function of the collaborative means a more

differentiated structure, whereas dependence means more integration. Overall, these researchers concluded that to increase the sustainability of collaborations, there must be a way to address miscommunication and conflict, there must be a balance between both the formality and informality in form and the dependence or independence in function, and the administration of funding must not undermine this process. Further, collaborating partners must determine how to balance the benefit of using standardized policies and procedures while keeping the environment flexible and informal enough to encourage innovation and productivity.

Perhaps most relevant to the current study is the classic social experiment known as the Chicago Area Project (CAP) of the 1930s and 1940s. The CAP, created by Chicago School's Clifford Shaw, was designed to identify local institutions suitable for sponsorship and recruit community members who could unite around child welfare issues. Rather than outsiders imposing problem definition and solutions, the idea was that this would be the responsibility of the target community itself.

This social experiment is quite well known, but only in a general sense; the specifics of the daily operations are less well understood. Schlossman and Sedlak (1983) examined the CAP and focused on the efforts in the Russell Square neighborhood since this was the most successful of the project's pioneer communities. The target community was comprised of a significantly high proportion of immigrants, and had a variety of concerns including overcrowding, health problems, inadequate housing, low education levels, lack of informal social control, and high delinquency levels. Shaw set out to test whether this community could demonstrate self-renewal, increased organization, and decreased delinquency through recreation, communal self-renewal, and mediation, and he attempted to identify which community institutions were the most influential and could partner with CAP in this endeavor. Shaw wanted to sponsor a sports league

and use street outreach workers to identify the most “at-risk” youth for involvement.

Additionally, this program would recruit adults to supervise and build relationships with the youth.

Since the community was quite resistant to outsiders, Shaw attempted to partner with select trusted community leaders. Much sociological research was being conducted on South Chicago communities at this time, and the results typically painted a negative public image of these residents. The CAP was designed to utilize a ground-up approach and be community-driven rather than dictating social change from the outside. Schlossman and Sedlak (1983) indicate that CAP had a clear theoretical orientation, targeted the most delinquent youth, and developed partnerships among neighborhood entities, thus providing one example of an attempt at innovation in the area of delinquency prevention. However, there are significant criticisms and challenges that must be addressed. Most importantly, CAP is extremely difficult to evaluate due to a lack of precision in discussions of implementation; in fact, discussions tend to emphasize the ideological significance of the program rather than provide evidence of daily operations. Those involved with CAP dealt with tensions between professionals on the outside and local community members, relations with social workers and clergy, and conflicts over funding streams, but the resolutions are unclear. This program sounds promising in principle, but it is impossible to evaluate or precisely replicate. However, it can be used to inform the current study as it was designed to be a ground-up approach to community improvement and delinquency prevention.

***Street outreach.*** The most relevant literature for the current project addresses the field of street outreach. From the 1950s to the present, street outreach has been one method used as an attempt to reduce gang violence, particularly in Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Philadelphia,

but the results of these efforts are mixed (Decker, Bynum, McDevitt, Farrell, & Varano, 2008). Klein and Maxson (2006) advise that in the 1950s and 1960s, conventional wisdom or that which was “obvious” to policy makers held that dedicated street outreach workers building relationships with gang members could eradicate the street gang problem. The support for this approach was the notion that individuals indigenous to the target communities could have a broader impact on the client population than would social workers or other practitioners coming in from the outside, as residents of these communities, particularly gang members, were often reluctant to trust or build relationships with outsiders. However, Klein and Maxson (2006) note that these programs for the most part were failures because they failed to address systemic, institutional, and structural factors of communities and existing conflicting class-related values.

Street outreach work has been identified as a promising approach for gang prevention and intervention, but currently it is not implemented systematically or uniformly, which makes evaluation and replication nearly impossible (Decker et al., 2008). Outreach workers fill a unique role as the “bridge” between gang youth, the community as a whole, and the various agencies that are trying to reach these populations including social services and law enforcement officials. According to Decker and colleagues (2008), the primary functions of street outreach programs include: 1) linking target youth to services and prosocial activities, and 2) engaging in various activities alongside youth to educate them on general violence issues as well as disrupt the cycle of violence. It is crucial for outreach workers to establish credibility both with youth and law enforcement agencies in order to facilitate this process. These researchers offer a list of challenges and corresponding recommendations for the development and implementation of street outreach programs.

The first challenge is the need for workers to maintain boundaries with their target youth population (Decker et al., 2008). This is accomplished by carefully recruiting only workers who have ceased all prior gang or criminal activity, conducting ongoing training and supervision with workers, and clarifying with all parties involved that workers will not share information with law enforcement even though law enforcement may share information with workers as appropriate. The second challenge is establishing leadership and clarifying focus, which can be accomplished by workers reporting back to some centralized leadership and by articulating program goals and activities prior to the onset of service provision. Thirdly, outreach work is emotionally taxing, so worker retention is a concern. Communication and support between all team members is essential, and workers must continue to build skills that will help them as they move down their career paths. Fourth, street outreach programs often lose momentum and phase out over time – this can be avoided as program staff carefully collect data and conduct evaluations, routinely assess the gang problem, and collaborate with law enforcement; these individuals aid in establishing the legitimacy of the outreach workers. Lastly, street outreach work must not produce unintended harmful consequences. It is important to establish policies and procedures for addressing the media and handling possible inter-agency conflicts that may arise.

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention outlines the role of street outreach in the Comprehensive Gang Model (2009) and advises that the street outreach worker is the link between at-risk youth and the institutions and law enforcement of which they are typically wary or skeptical. The outreach worker must be able to function comfortably and safely within the community in which the target population lives, goes to school, works, and hangs out on a daily basis. Outreach workers have many duties and some examples of typical tasks include assessing youth needs; mentoring; intervening in crises; liaising between youth, families,

schools, and community organizations; responding to conflicts and violent incidents; connecting incarcerated and recently released youth to the community. Outreach workers are an essential component of the intervention team because they are particularly close to the target population. They can help guide the assessment and case management process, are often aware of impending criminal activity or violence, and have a general sense of the climate in the community.

It is important for the intervention team to maintain open and frequent communication and to keep clear boundaries between the roles of each of the team members. According to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (2009), outreach workers should be ethnically representative of the target population, should understand and have strong ties to the community in which they will work, should have gang culture expertise, and should be able to work with high-risk youth and families. They should be willing to work a nontraditional schedule and must not be currently involved in any gang or criminal activity.

Wolf and Gutierrez (2011) note that street outreach is increasingly used as a gang prevention and intervention method, examine outreach services across several cities, and make recommendations for hiring and supporting outreach workers. When hiring or contracting outreach workers, organizational standards should require careful screening to ensure proper fit between worker, partner agencies, law enforcement, and target community and population. Careful screening helps protect prospective workers, clients, and stakeholders. Workers with criminal histories should not necessarily be ruled out, given the nature of the work, but it must be evident that the workers are not involved in criminal activity or hard drug use at the time of hiring. Once hired, outreach workers should be compensated with fair wages and benefits packages. They should be given ongoing career development opportunities and regular supervision and feedback.

According to the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (2009), street outreach has again become an important component of gang prevention and intervention. The effectiveness of street outreach rests on the ability of individuals, often reformed gang members, to build relationships with at-risk youth in their respective communities. Outreach workers serve as mentors and role models, respond to crisis situations, encourage youth to stay in school and help negotiate safe passages through gang territories, and link youth and their families to social services as needed.

Street outreach is not part of the more recently emphasized evidence-based practice literature to date due to lack of evaluations and research, but a growing body of work suggests that there are certain key program characteristics and recommendations for implementing street outreach successfully: 1) workers must connect with target youth and should be similar in background and ethnicity, should have strong community ties, and should have a certain reputation or street credibility; 2) workers should operate within a framework of clearly defined goals and objectives since they cannot provide all services for all people; 3) workers should have a clearly articulated understanding and assessment of the gang problem; 4) they should implement the program with fidelity; 5) they must be responsive to client needs; 6) they should work within a system of community collaboration and be able to make referrals as appropriate; and 7) they must establish a working relationship with law enforcement which is challenging and complicated given the very different functions of each party but necessary for real community change (National Council on Crime and Delinquency, 2009).

One evaluated violence prevention program to which street outreach is a central component is Chicago's CeaseFire program (more recently referred to as Cure Violence). Most street outreach efforts do not appear to be based on a theoretical framework, but CeaseFire,

which originates from principles of the Chicago Area Project in the 1930s and 1940s (discussed in more detail below), is driven by a theory of behavior that is based on concepts more recently utilized in the public health field. Essentially, the goal of CeaseFire is to reduce shootings and killings by changing norms about violence, providing violence alternatives to gangs on the streets in a timely fashion, and increasing the perceived risk of violent activity for targeted high-risk youth (Skogan, Hartnett, Bump, & Dubois, 2008). Outreach workers serve as mentors and role models and help link youth to necessary services such as education, employment, mental health and substance abuse treatment. Violence interrupters monitor the streets and work to deescalate conflict and reduce retaliatory killings. Because of the nature of the target population, the outreach workers and violence interrupters have to be street savvy; they often have a history of gang or criminal activity but must show evidence that they have left that lifestyle. Skogan and colleagues completed an evaluation of CeaseFire (2008) and their findings indicate that the client outreach element of the program was successful, and in some neighborhoods, it appears that shootings and retaliatory killings were reduced by the introduction of CeaseFire. However, these findings are mixed and should be interpreted with some caution. In some neighborhoods, it was clear that the reduction in shootings could be attributed to the introduction of CeaseFire, but in other areas it was unclear both because of program implementation complications and research design issues.

Basheer and Hoag (2014) provide an in-depth discussion of what it is to be a street intervention worker from the perspective of an individual who has worked in gang intervention for over forty years. In perhaps the only book of its kind, the authors discuss what it means to develop the type and level of street credibility necessary to impact gang and violence involved populations. They also examine the variety of roles and responsibilities common in gang

intervention work, including acting as first responders to violent incidents; managing crowds and controlling the spread of rumors; assisting victims; mediating conflicts between enemies; intervening in domestic violence situations; working with and around schools to provide safe passage to and build relationships with children and adolescents; working with imprisonment and reentry issues; and balancing this emotionally taxing work with family life. Lastly, they highlight the importance of establishing systematic procedures and protocols in intervention work to facilitate safety in implementation and increase professionalism in this field.

All of this research is suggestive and points to important issues about street outreach work. It indicates that street outreach is a potentially viable response to gang violence, highlights some potential challenges in this field, and describes various characteristics of street outreach workers and their collaborating partners. However, there is a gap in understanding what this work actually entails. The fairly sparse literature that does exist provides a cursory glance at the field but it does not explore how it plays out on the ground level, and how the people who do this work actually see it. The current study addresses this gap.

## **Research Goals**

PACE's holistic approach to community empowerment sounds promising on the surface. However, this is not a new concept; rather, it is one that various entities attempt to reinvent periodically. Additionally, the rhetoric on collaboration and community empowerment generally seems to be based mostly on common sense and ideology rather than scientific evidence. Proponents of this approach tend to support the notion that it works but do not explicitly explain how: implementation is unclear, which prevents evaluation and replication.

In spite of even the best of intentions, and regardless of the given target population, true interagency collaboration is extremely difficult in the social services field. This is perhaps due to

a combination of varying agency mission statements, difficulty in establishing an effective system of communication, the complexity of articulating clear goals and objectives, varying and perhaps competing funding sources, political and personal agendas, and interpersonal issues. Ultimately, what may begin as a collaboration effort often results in broken systems and a failure to reach the target client population(s). This research examines the dynamics involved in this particular ground-up approach to coordinating citywide gang prevention and intervention efforts across multiple nonprofit agencies and individuals from rival neighborhoods.

The PACE organization appears to have a unique opportunity to overcome some of these collaboration barriers. This grassroots effort to unite various nonprofit street outreach and law enforcement agencies in select communities in Los Angeles in the development of a gang prevention and intervention strategy is privately funded and has some political support. This allows a certain amount of freedom in program or strategy development and implementation. Also, it appears that there is not just one entity dictating how the process unfolds. Most interestingly, the key players involved in this effort have different backgrounds and varying or possibly conflicting agendas. There are those grounded in academia, research, and evidence-based practice principles; law enforcement officials trained in deterrence and suppression tactics; and reformed gang members who may adhere to or work within a code of the street framework (Anderson, 1999). The members of this diverse group of people are consulting with each other each step of the way and must come to agreement about how this effort will be built from the ground up. Of course, this might sound simple but in reality it is a complex process of negotiation and development.

The diversity in perspectives or agendas provides a unique opportunity to collaborate across lines that have created barriers in communities; however, it may also create conflict and

an environment in which participants speak past each other rather than communicate and compromise. Additionally, collaboration is often quite nuanced in nature. Rather than existing as a broad, general phenomenon, collaboration often happens between particular parties in specific ways. Initially, the research goals of the current study were to examine the multi-layered process of community empowerment, capacity building, and collaboration by PACE and its partner organizations and to determine how collaboration actually happens and who drives the process on the ground level using qualitative research methods including participant observation and semi-structured interviews. Fairly early in the research process, I noted that the project's most significant work was that done on the ground by the street outreach workers, or interventionists, and this study primarily explores this work and these collaborative efforts from the street outreach perspective. Thus, this project aims to put a more human face on the formal and often vague concept of "collaboration" – to understand how the individuals involved in the real work of collaboration actually behave and interact in the midst of very challenging circumstances.

## **Chapter 2. Methodology**

This qualitative field study contributes to existing social science research on urban community development, gangs, and violence prevention and intervention. This research explores the dynamics and intricacies involved in the grass roots attempt to unify existing street outreach agencies for the purpose of maximizing violence prevention and intervention efforts with high risk populations. It examines the ways in which the street outreach workers identify the problems and solutions and addresses dynamics of and barriers to collaboration and service provision in prevention and intervention work. Finally, it provides a ground-level analysis of the process of street outreach worker-driven services for the purpose of developing a successful model for citywide outreach and advocacy that can be implemented in Los Angeles as well as other cities.

### **Rationale for the Qualitative Approach**

This method is best suited for research on the process of forming and implementing a street outreach worker-driven collaborative effort in Los Angeles. The current study builds on the existing research about gangs and the response to gangs and explores an innovative, grassroots initiative that is being built from the ground up. The qualitative method allows the researcher to be immersed into a social phenomenon rather than simply reading about it, and this method expands our knowledge because it involves being a part of some aspect of social life to a certain degree (Esterberg, 2002). Ethnographic field study gives the researcher the ability to study action and then interpret the data for the purpose of building grounded theory; grounded theory is used as a method to study, understand, and develop theories about our social worlds (Charmaz, 2006). This of course assumes that researchers utilizing these methods will make conclusions about or interpretations of the studied worlds. For this reason, it is crucial that

researchers collect detailed, rich data and provide the appropriate social contexts in interpretation. This most accurately portrays how the study participants make sense of their respective social worlds.

According to Katz (1997), a main benefit of qualitative research is that it explores underlying meanings of social phenomena in often difficult to access worlds and connects the audience to what is behind the scenes. Additionally, this research method has merit as a “vigorous form of policy research” (Katz, 1997); it can produce more than summary indicators demonstrated by quantitative studies because qualitative methods give situational context. Also, as Katz notes, there are instances in which policy decisions are made in direct opposition to what empirical evidence might suggest, indicating that there are other driving forces at hand. The qualitative method is best suited for exploring “situational contingencies,” or the meanings or nuances of a social phenomenon. Since it is a generally accepted notion that collaboration should make service provision more effective in social services, it is vital to go beyond this (often) abstract idea and explore what this actually entails.

The qualitative method is particularly useful for gang research. Official data sources often do not give an accurate picture of gangs or gang issues because of the political and institutional influences involved. Available statistics are often collected and analyzed primarily as they pertain to crime and violence, and this gives an incomplete picture (Joe, 1993). This is especially true for ethnic-specific gang research. A major challenge for researchers is gaining access to the given population for the purpose of obtaining the most representative sample possible. For example, in gang research, identifying and gaining access to gang members, associates, and outreach workers can be challenging due to the prevailing mistrust of outsiders. Gaining access can be particularly difficult for outsiders of black communities because of the

history of race and power struggles; community members may question what will be done with the information that is gathered and whether it will be shared with law enforcement or will result in negative policy ramifications (Debra & Conley, 1993). Building trust and rapport between researcher and subjects often takes a considerable amount of time and effort. This was certainly the case in the current study. Over time, I gained access to several different venues and groups and developed rapport with individuals of different backgrounds and specializations including gang intervention, law enforcement, education, community activism, and labor and employment.

### **Research Design**

At the end of 2012, I learned of an opportunity to attend meetings and learn about the community work facilitated by the PACE organization. At that time, PACE personnel had approached faculty at the University of California, Irvine to form a connection between the academic research community and practitioners delivering services on the ground. Though I quickly determined that it would not be possible to conduct a formal evaluation or statistical analysis of the effectiveness of gang prevention and intervention work, this opportunity would allow me to unpack the notion of community collaboration specifically as it pertains to the field of gang prevention and intervention. This collaborative effort was a grassroots, ground-up approach to uniting individuals with a common purpose or vision, across varying specializations and expertise, and this opportunity for study allowed me to gain an insider's perspective on this social phenomenon. Additionally, it was during this initial period that I began to see that street outreach workers, or interventionists, appeared to be driving much of the collaboration and the work that was happening on the ground level. During this project, I traveled to several locations to attend meetings as a participant observer and to interview PACE staff, board members, and

fundings; to observe on-site outreach work in the respective target communities; and to interview outreach program executive directors and staff members.

**Participant observation.** The participant observation phase of this project included attending meetings at the PACE organization over a span of six months and weekly community task force meetings over a span of two years. PACE held monthly meetings in classroom space at a Southern California university. The staff, nonprofit executive directors, and community outreach workers were in attendance at these meetings. These meetings were used as trainings for capacity building as well as opportunities for collaboration in program model development. Periodically, the organization's advisory board members and law enforcement officials also attended and participated in these meetings. The original eight collaborating nonprofit organizations worked together to do community outreach including gang prevention and intervention, crisis intervention, violence interruption, rumor control, safe passage negotiation, and mentoring in a variety of locations including neighborhood streets, schools, parks, sporting events, and social service organizations.

Each week, a community task force, a prototype for community policing, holds meetings facilitated by Los Angeles law enforcement officials. Those in attendance at these meetings include law enforcement, several of the street outreach workers associated with PACE, community members including school representatives, clergy, and other volunteers. These meetings were highly relevant to this project due to the overarching goal of the task force to combat the gang problem in Los Angeles; additionally, many of the individuals involved directly with PACE are also part of the task force.

I gained access to these meetings and was introduced to all in attendance as a student researcher working on her dissertation in Criminology. I informed the participants of my general

research interests including juvenile delinquency, rehabilitation and prevention, prisoner reentry, and gang involvement, and explained that of particular interest for the current project was an exploration of how this community collaboration effort in gang prevention and intervention unfolds. Those in attendance at the meetings made no objections to my attendance or extensive note taking; in fact, several nonprofit agency members provided their personal contact information as well as invitations to come out to their respective communities and “see what we do.”

For the observational portion of this research project, the number of subjects was highly variable and was based upon who attended each respective community meeting or task force meeting. The number of attendees fluctuated based upon scheduling availability. The PACE organization staff members were present for each community meeting as well as for occasional task force meetings; generally, a few executive directors and several street outreach workers from each nonprofit organization were present; law enforcement officials were also in attendance as their availability permitted, and community members were fairly regularly in attendance.

As a participant observer at meetings and the respective target community locations, I took extensive notes on what I saw, heard, and felt to create the most vivid descriptions possible. With this type of study, if a researcher is sufficiently detail-oriented in the note-taking process at meetings and during interviews, these social interactions essentially come to life to a certain degree and, therefore, the process should capture descriptions of the scene and actions and dialogue of the characters involved (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). This data collection should be process-oriented, capturing a sense of the whole context, not just separate segments; should pay close attention to what the research subjects find meaningful (see also Charmaz, 2006); and should make ongoing comparisons between earlier and later data. Emerson and colleagues

(1995) refer to this process as “participating in order to write”, in that it involves recording initial impressions; noting key events and personal reactions to those events and how these might compare to participants’ feelings; and capturing a sense of what participants see as meaningful or important. This was certainly possible in this current study as I was welcomed into the respective groups and was expected to take notes throughout the meetings.

Typically, field notes are initially captured onsite as jottings that are later expanded into full-length notes (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2006). At the meetings, I had the advantage of being able to use a laptop computer and was expected to take notes; on one hand, this made it possible to write more thorough notes than the typical hasty jottings. However, this could have potentially detracted from my ability to look around and become fully engaged in the environment. Therefore, I continually had to make an effort to balance what could have become almost transcription writing with sufficient observation of non-verbal behavior and environmental factors. The purpose of this note-taking method was not to make broad generalizations or inferences but rather to record the raw behavior of the research participants in an effort to actually capture their perspectives and beliefs (Lofland et al., 2006; Esterberg, 2002; Emerson et al., 1995).

**Semi-structured interviews.** The semi-structured interview phase of this project commenced once I was able to begin to ascertain which meeting attendees were most closely involved with community collaboration efforts specifically addressing gang prevention and intervention. Semi-structured interviews involve in-depth exploration of how informants make sense of their experiences. These interviews are a good way to build on observations and explore phenomena further. Generally, they should begin with open-ended questions; though this type of interview differs from that guided by a questionnaire, it is still helpful to create an interview

guide. Prior to conducting interviews, the researcher should have a grasp on the types of questions he or she has about the given phenomenon; these questions should connect to field observations (Charmaz, 2006; Lofland et al., 2006). The researcher should prepare open-ended questions and follow-up probes and should pay attention both to what is said and what is not said but might be of significance. In the current study, I began this phase by approaching individuals either before or after meetings, introducing the research project, and asking whether he or she might be interested in participating in an interview. Interestingly, several meeting attendees actually approached me offering to share their experiences before the interview phase had begun. Overall, my prospective interviewees were open to my presence and questions in spite of the fact that I was an outsider to the group – I am a white, female, graduate student researcher from the upper middle class, whereas my interviewees are primarily black individuals from lower-income communities. No individuals declined to participate in the interviews.

According to Esterberg (2002), semi-structured, in-depth interviews dig deep to explore participants' feelings, experiences, and perspectives; this involves the researcher listening carefully and following the informants' lead. With this method, research participants are able to tell their own stories. Since behavior, including verbal behavior, is indicative of participants' worldview or perspectives, the researchers must listen to the language and terms informants use and also pay attention to the context in which that language is applied; this is the way to avoid generalizing and stereotyping and instead capture members' meanings (Emerson, et al., 1995). Also, interviews can be particularly useful for clarification of specific terms, topics, and details captured during observation. Further, Emerson and colleagues (1995) note that participants construct meaning as they interact with each other, dialogue, and engage in various social exchanges, so it is important to supplement interviews with notes on naturally occurring

dialogue; understanding how members make categorizations in turn sheds light on how they make sense of or size each other up. For this project, I began each interview with a few general questions and topic areas in mind (see Appendix A) but allowed the interviewees to guide the process in an effort to understand what was important and meaningful to him or her. Most of the interviewees agreed to have me audio record the interviews; this freed me from the burden of extensive note-taking efforts and allowed for a more relaxed, conversational interaction. These audio recordings were then later transcribed for data analysis.

**Sample.** The subject population included adults, ages 18 and older, involved in some capacity in the collaborative effort with PACE in Los Angeles. Researchers and practitioners, board members and funders, law enforcement personnel, street outreach workers, and interested community members comprise this population. The sample of interview subjects was initially variable, depending on initial observations during the larger community meetings and task force meetings; I conducted semi-structured interviews with those individuals who appeared to be more centrally situated or involved with the collaboration effort. The interview sample includes a total of 15 initial interviews and two follow-up interviews, and the sample comprises five individuals directly involved with gang intervention, two law enforcement officials, two individuals involved with education, one clergy member, one task force board member, one PACE organization board member, one PACE executive director, one labor and employment activist, and a community advocate.

**Data analysis.** The analysis for this project began during the coding phase. During initial coding, I used a line-by-line coding technique to begin making sense of the data. The second phase of coding, or more focused coding, was used to build on initial coding and tie larger portions of data together (Lofland et al., 2006; Esterberg, 2002). As Charmaz (2006) advises,

codes help separate data into different theoretical categories, indicate actions and events in the data, produce the frame of the analysis, and build theory that describes and explains the data. Based on her guidelines for developing grounded theory (2006), the coding plan for the current project included the following: Code the data as actions so as not to jump to conceptual or analytic conclusions prematurely; move quickly through the data initially; capture participants' impressions; code line by line so as not miss valuable data; ask critical questions throughout the coding phase; compare observations between meetings and interviews to show the evolution of actions, ideas, and progress; compare between participants and meetings; ensure that the codes closely connect to the data, so it is not just the researcher's thoughts and feelings coming through in the analyses; and note the language and terms used by groups and individuals since this language is often taken for granted as understood by all involved and occasionally required clarification.

### **Chapter 3. Overview of PACE Collaborative Street Outreach Work**

This qualitative project explores the ground-up approach to coordinating street outreach and gang prevention and intervention services across multiple nonprofit agencies and individuals from rival neighborhoods. This chapter provides an overview of who these street outreach workers are, and examines what their work comprises in their respective target communities; chapter four describes what intervention workers identify as the necessary personal characteristics for those who work in this field; chapter five outlines the obstacles and challenges these interventionists face; chapter six examines their identified needs in this line of work; and chapter seven provides a discussion of these findings, policy implications, possible limitations to the study, and suggestions for future research.

#### **Outreach Workers: Who They Are**

Street outreach workers, or interventionists, are individuals with strong community ties who wish to combat violence in their target neighborhoods and strengthen these communities from the inside out. They often acknowledge that historically, they were part of the problem with their own gang activity or other criminal behavior, but now they are committed to being part of the solution. Many attempt to identify other like-minded individuals with whom they can collaborate for the shared goals of reducing violence and affecting lasting community change.

**Community ties.** Street outreach workers generally have close connections to the communities in which they work. Many of them live in the same neighborhoods where they grew up; for this reason, they are able to understand the complexities of their environments and maintain relationships with influential community residents who are both gang and non-gang members. In this particular case, these communities are located in the southern portion of a large, western metropolitan area, and residents are predominantly Black or Hispanic/Latino; these

communities are known as high crime areas with between 25-35% of residents living below poverty level (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). Most intervention workers were born and raised in the neighborhoods that are the target locations for their services. Often, their families have lived in these areas for several generations. As one street outreach worker notes:

A lot of these people that grew up in these streets since the seventies and sixties, their roots...go real long... Like me, I'm the baby boy ... my roots, that's what goes deep... I always been around in the streets 'cause my family. Got long roots and stuff in different neighborhoods. (A'Don, personal communication, July 15, 2014).

Much of the work experience that is most highly valued in the gang intervention field is related to a worker's personal history. Due to the nature of this work, respect and credibility are crucial to effective intervention efforts. A street outreach worker explains:

It ain't like having a business where you can just hire somebody off the streets and stuff, you know. Everybody's gotta have a resume, and the resume makes the system, the time you done in prison, the type of stuff you did in the streets, you can't come to the table being some former, you know, being just, out of a job. (A'Don, personal communication, October 29, 2013)

He later clarifies that while he is not celebrating or excusing criminal behavior, he recognizes that earning the level of street credibility needed to impact some important issues in his community often requires some kind of crime or gang related past. He states:

I mean... it ain't cool havin' a felony and all that, but...I don't know what type of intervention worker I'd be if I'd never been to the pen, if I was a...church boy...choir boy... I'd have to come from a family with a bunch of gang members and stuff, to get my

point across...I ain't pick this...this is by default - it picked me...I was born into it.

(A'Don, personal communication, July 15, 2014).

Street outreach workers are particularly interested in interrupting the cycle of crime and violence in their communities. Often, due to their personal histories of gang and crime related activities, they may have somewhat limited career opportunities. However, they are uniquely equipped to work as mediators and mentors in their communities of origin and often identify young people as the population most amenable to change. As one intervention worker highlights:

And so we teach these kids that so they won't fall into the traps of being stuck out here in these gangs, stuck out here in these systems, stuck out here in these things that they can never reverse because once you're in the gang, you in the gang. There's no comin' out of it. Now, you could slow this thing down and start doin' some positive things, but everyone is still gonna view you as this gang member. Even myself... even though I'm doin' the good work that I am doin', there's still some things in my record... that's holdin' me back. That will hold me back 'til the day I die. I can't change that, but I can change my actions today. I can change everything that I'm doing, and I can help others because I know I've destroyed some things, so I have to give back. (Darien, personal communication, March 6, 2014).

He acknowledges how powerful the concept of image is in his community. Like many other workers, he has a personal history of gang involvement and criminal activity. He believes that his future opportunities are limited in specific ways because of his past choices, and he explains that, even though he cannot reverse what has happened in the past, he can use even his image as a gang member to impact his neighborhood positively moving forward.

**From problems to solutions.** Gang prevention and intervention work is particularly relevant in these neighborhoods because of the volatile history of many communities in this city. Many intervention workers feel a sense of responsibility for the problems in their neighborhoods because of their actions as adolescents and young adults. As one street outreach worker explains:

The people in our community, in our zip code, we did it to ourselves. We tore our own community up. Nobody outside our community came and tore our community up ‘cause we wouldn’t let ‘em, (laughter) you know what I’m sayin’? We’re not gonna let nobody from the outside come here and tear it up, but we tore it up. And then we cry about it. And then...we complain about it... but we’re not doin’ nothin’ about it. So, that’s where I want to put... the resources in there so you don’t have nothin’ to complain and cry about now. It’s on you. It’s on the individual. You understand what I’m sayin’? Don’t cry and complain about it. You want better? Do better. (Darien, personal communication, March 6, 2014).

Street outreach workers are typically able to identify potential issues quickly and to have the necessary contacts and relationships to implement strategies to alleviate these problems. For this reason, they are also able to hold neighborhood residents accountable for their actions and speak from a framework of personal experience.

This metropolitan area has a distinctive sense of division between neighborhood and community boundaries. This division can almost appear to be an “insider vs. outsider” dynamic, and some residents appear to have a clear sense of who belongs and who is an “other.” Some indicate that this is a cultural phenomenon in this area to which children become accustomed at an early age. For this reason, outreach workers have a unique opportunity to intervene with

community residents at an early age. One intervention worker explains his perspective on how to help neighborhoods begin to address some of these obstacles:

We break down those barriers. We break down those... imaginary lines where we're now bridging the gap from the two communities... where when I was growing up... it was just unheard of. You don't go on that side of the freeway... And the same, vice versa. They don't come on this side... So, the communities are now... starting to work with each other. There's not so much... violence between the two communities. Now, some of the schools are allowing the kids on this side to go to schools over there, and the same - the kids over there are startin' to come to schools over here... it just happened like that because of jurisdictions... because of your zip code of where you grew up, where... your home is... you go to this school... and it seems like when you get to high school because of the school being so large... now you get the two communities coming to the one school and then they clash... These things that has been set up to... just terrorize our communities... naturally... the youth fall into these traps because of... lack of knowledge that...they're the same just as us. But, if they see that the school system is separating us, the parks are separating us, the gangs are separating us... naturally... the youth will say, 'Okay, we're not the same as them. They're not the same as us. We're supposed to fight. We're supposed to not get along. We're supposed to... just go at with each other,' and that's not true. (Darien, personal communication, March 6, 2014).

Law enforcement personnel recognize that street outreach is a viable intervention strategy in these neighborhoods especially in situations involving violent or other criminal incidents. Law enforcement officials can work with street outreach workers post incidents to quell rumors and target policing efforts to address the most dangerous situations and relevant parties as opposed to

using a more generalized enforcement approach. One lieutenant points out that street outreach workers help him and his unit to work more effectively in the community:

This is where gang intervention comes in. This is where the people that I have contact with...we can talk about this and say, 'Hey, you know what? Guys, let us do our job. Let us... go after the bad guys in this case. I need you to send out this information to the people that...you know, that are a part of these gangs, to not retaliate....You need to tell your guys stop...this is what's gonna happen if they don't stop.' And...it works...it gives us an opportunity to address many issues before they become a huge issue. (David, personal communication, March 27, 2014).

He further explains how intervention workers are essential in other ways, such as when a murder occurs and a funeral must be planned in a given neighborhood. Often, the complexities of the nature of these communities make it so that individuals must pass through enemy territories to attend funerals or must encounter family members of rival gangs when dealing with this type of victimization. He notes that it is critical for law enforcement to establish solid working relationships with street outreach personnel to work most effectively in these circumstances:

The stronger the relationships we build, the more opportunities...we have to get intervention done at a different level. It's not just us...it's very much the gang interventionists and...the community leaders as well... another example - there was a gang funeral that was going on, and we were there because we knew that there was gang members involved in it...there was a huge fight that erupted in this church... under normal circumstances, we'd go in there and have to kick everybody out ...But, these relationships and their knowledge that we were there to help them secure the location, actually allowed them to come out and tell us, 'Hey, let us deal with this... Give us an

opportunity, and then...if we need to, we will...have you guys help us out.' ...that feud was stopped, and they were able to take care of it themselves...without us actually having to go in and intervene...with police tactics. (David, personal communication, March 27, 2014).

There are some cases in which the police prefer to let the community residents handle their own issues if they can do so without incident. In the above case, the intervention workers were essential in mediating a large fight without law enforcement involvement. This was only possible because of the working relationship that exists between these law enforcement officials and street outreach workers.

**Connection to the larger collaborative.** The PACE organization provides funding to six intervention programs in several specific target areas of Los Angeles. This interview data comprises interviews with individuals from three of these organizations. These street outreach workers not only collaborate with PACE, but they also make varying levels of connection with local law enforcement personnel, neighborhood school staff, parks and recreation employees, clergy members, and political figures. Street outreach workers are trained to become savvy in building relationships with any community-minded individuals with whom they might partner in their efforts to combat violence and build stronger, healthier communities. As one intervention worker indicates:

Common goal at the end of the day...save a life...and buildin' healthy communities. So, with the guys as members just rightin' a wrong...you got to surely believe...that what we was doin' was wrong before you can even attempt to start doin' this work, you know? ...it's a collaborative...for law enforcement, the community, and former gang members...collaboratin' with somebody that you used to be enemies with...And... you

gotta get a good trust and understandin' with that person because you got to realize, when you start collaboratin' with somebody you used... be shootin' at...how are your friends gonna look at you from your community, your homeboys...'Oh, you done got soft,' or, 'You must be snitchin',' or, 'You're weak,' somethin' like that...you can't worry about what your homeboys think 'cause if you know it's right with inside yourself, you got to just go with that, and then the other person from the other community, y'all feel the same way - you got to stick together no matter what... 'Cause, you know, the common goal to save a life. (Marcus, personal communication, January 28, 2014).

He recognizes that it is no easy task to live a new lifestyle of peace when he has a personal history of violence. However, he acknowledges that once an intervention worker commits to this cause, he or she can then identify other individuals of like mind and work toward this common goal of saving lives and affecting change in the neighborhood.

### **Outreach Workers: What They Do**

Based on their specific skill sets, street outreach workers are equipped for a variety of tasks and responsibilities in their respective communities. On a daily basis, these include relationship building; conflict management; working around schools; safe passage negotiation; and general community building activities.

**Relationship building.** The essence of both gang prevention and intervention, and this notion of strengthening the community from the inside out, can be seen in the daily responsibilities and actions of street outreach workers. These individuals wear many hats and must juggle numerous roles throughout any given day. First and foremost, given the often adversarial neighborhood relationships between communities that might be distinguished by little more than a street or freeway division, outreach workers must be able to bridge the gap between

respective communities. Often, this begins by building relationships with outreach workers in adjacent, and often rival, neighborhoods. One outreach worker states:

We have to grow relationships with other communities and other people...to intervene... different communities ... that we didn't grow up with ...and then later in life, we viewed 'em as enemies. Well... we create relationships with other intervention workers that's from different areas, our surrounding area. We grow...relationships with these people because our youth may have a run in with another youth from that area, and it might spark a situation, but because we're able to pick up the phone and say, 'Hey, man, I have a situation, man. One of your youth over there, you know, one of the youth over here. Hey, let's pull those guys to the side, get the true story... kill the rumors...so it won't grow into a bigger problem.' (Darien, personal communication, March 6, 2014).

He highlights the fact that children growing up in many of these communities organically develop an “us vs. them” mentality simply because of where they live or which schools they attend, and that, sadly, these youth often categorize each other as enemies as they grow older. This development can lead to conflict or even violent incidents during adolescence and beyond when these youth have “run ins” or various kinds of interactions with youth in surrounding communities. Street outreach workers can use the relationships they have built across community and neighborhood lines to intervene in these situations with something even as simple as a phone call to a fellow outreach worker.

Another intervention worker discusses how important this type of relationship building and communication is, especially given the complexity of gang life in his neighborhood:

The gang mentality of violence... in our community... it's a lack of communication, and... that's the key of it... and then the lack of knowledge and the lack of...

understandin'...each other... so once we can better develop that and educate each other... we gain that more understandin' with each other that we can live in our community together. (Anthony, personal communication, January 24, 2014).

He indicates that developing an understanding of- and increasing communication between- members of neighboring rival communities can in turn create the possibility to coexist in these environments. This is crucial in these areas that are often characterized by a certain level of hostility and violence between inhabitants.

Outreach workers who have grown up in these communities have great insight into the mentality of community members, particularly those who are involved with gangs. One worker indicates that gang intervention is much like working with families:

I put myself on the line, in the middle, to intervene in between like communities...a gang is, like...a family...I know when you hear gangs, you think just the worst...all the negative...but you're dealin' with people and people have so many different emotions and so many different thoughts, so many different things about themselves...and you can't just...kind of categorize it...a gang...you're dealin' with people, so relationship buildin'...is always key. It's always key. (Darien, personal communication, March 6, 2014).

Here, he illuminates the importance of the relational nature of this work and the need to be able to build connections across gang lines. He further explains:

Once you build a relationship with different people, and different communities, and different gangs, they're gonna trust you and know that you will bring back the right information. That you will go out there and do the work that you say that you're doing to mitigate...any...situations between different communities. And...I've had some gang

members come to me say, ‘Hey man, can you go talk to them guys over there. You know, they’re writin’ on the wall. We don’t like them writin’ on our wall...tell ‘em to stop. Give ‘em a warning. You know, when, if it doesn’t stop then we’re gonna take it into our own hands.’ I’ve had that happen before. (Darien, personal communication, March 6, 2014).

Once street outreach workers can form some type of working relationship and level of trust with community members and other outreach workers across neighborhood and gang lines, they create the opportunity to prevent dangerous or violent incidents. Gang members may approach outreach workers - or perhaps might be approached by outreach workers - prior to engaging in a more aggressive or violent confrontation. Because the outreach workers have built those relationships and earned some level of respect in that area, they might have the chance to mediate between the individuals most central to the conflict.

Of utmost importance in the relationship-building component of intervention work is the ability to form connections not only with other intervention workers, but also with other key individuals in the target communities, thereby increasing one’s visibility in the field. According to one individual:

I guess with the work I’ve been doin’... it’s reachin’ out to not just my community but reachin’ out to different community, different taskforce, schools, parks and recreation - that’s where you actually know, ‘Okay, I’m really an...intervention worker’, ‘cause these people, like Marcus (an intervention worker in a rival neighborhood) said, they see you out there doin’ the work...Bein’ effective intervention worker. Not just like, ‘Oh, I’m an intervention worker in my neighborhood,’ but you ain’t got no collaboration, nobody...no solid resources or nothin’ like that...You can’t just be one individual. That’s something that I was tellin’ Anthony [the director of this intervention worker’s

organization]...tryin' to just be that one individual... at...all these different places...it ain't gonna work like that... you gotta be able to be a leader and have an all-star team (A'Don, personal communication, July 15, 2014).

He indicates that it is not sufficient to work within one's own community as merely one individual; rather, intervention work requires the ability to form relationships both inside and outside the neighborhood and to identify valuable resources that can support these efforts. These relationships might include other intervention workers, school personnel, community parks staff, relevant neighborhood task forces, and other community members who might bolster these efforts.

**Conflict management.** Due to the level of violence commonly associated with gang life, much of the daily or weekly routine for street outreach workers involves various levels of managing conflict. This could entail gathering information, controlling rumors, mediation and other types of communication, or on-scene crisis response. Ideally, outreach workers become involved quickly enough in conflict situations to prevent violence from occurring. When they become aware of potential problems, they respond according to established training protocols to address those issues. An intervention worker provides an example of how he was able to intervene in a situation in which his neighborhood had disrespected an enemy neighborhood before any violence occurred:

My guys went over there and sprayed up one of they walls and crossed 'em out, disrespected them, so...the guys... wanted to come back over and shoot one of my guys at the liquor store...the guys told my homies what was goin' on (laughter)...and my guys wanted to go over there with an AK and shoot 'em up...I got to intervene.... I said, '...can you give me a chance just to talk and see what's goin' on? Maybe I can resolve

some of this...he gave me an opportunity to do that, and...I ended up meetin' with...one of the guys over there ... I took one of my homies and he brung some of his homies up there, and we discussed the issue. You know, we really wasn't at war, meaning...killin' each other constantly...We just called ourselves enemies... we'd tic tac a little bit, fights and stuff like that, shoot at each other. Miss/hit, whatever...but we discussed our issues and...we don't got no problem. We don't want no issues. So, he went back to his neighborhood and I went back to mine and... things was understood...we don't have to disrespect them, they don't have to disrespect us...See how that works? Communication. We never had a communication line with 'em, never wanted to have a communication line. So, once we developed that, we had an understandin' of how we can better relate to each other and talk to each other" (Anthony, personal communication, January 24, 2014).

In this scenario, because of the relationship he had maintained with his former gang, as well as the respect he had earned in the community, this intervention worker was able to open the lines of communication with an "enemy" and prevent shootings and possible killings from happening as the result of blatant disrespect via graffiti on a wall. This outreach worker indicates that "tic tac" violence is common in his neighborhood, and this includes fights and even shootings between gangs that simply "call themselves enemies" without having major issues with each other. The ability to earn respect and maintain this type of relationship is crucial in these target communities. Further, this discussion of "tic tac" violence illustrates how dangerous these communities remain even when some say things are quieter or that gang violence has declined.

If prevention is not possible and a shooting or killing occurs in the neighborhood, outreach workers are often first responders to the scene. They are trained to assess the situation and help control the crowd in these scenarios. In these communities, street outreach workers

often have to address volatile reactions to law enforcement's response post shootings or killings. One interventionist describes his experience with crowd management at a crime scene when neighborhood residents were outraged at law enforcement conduct:

I done been in a situation on a crime scene, afterward with the body laid out and the police is out there, readin' the man's tattoo before they call the ambulance and everything, controllin' the crowd. By then, we have like 30/45 minutes went by - this man should have been in a hospital already... That's because the whole crowd, we got people out there screamin' and hollerin', 'Fuck y'all, the police.' 'They ain't got nothin' to do with this, hold on!' That's where that trainin' part come in, bein' there" (A'Don, personal communication, July 15, 2014).

Though this interventionist may have been dissatisfied with law enforcement's procedures in this situation, he utilized his training and helped manage the angry crowd. As soon as possible after a violent incident, interventionists work to prevent retaliatory violence and killings. An intervention worker describes how he and a counterpart worked quickly to prevent a potential gang war from erupting following the shooting of a teenager from a rival neighborhood:

A couple of family members had a relationship or affiliated with Southside Sloggers...that could have took on...a gang war based upon...our relationship or those individuals that live over there... the youngster, he was 16 years old, and ...another guy from Rumsey Boys end up shootin' him...but Marcus was sayin' that he was a problem child, he didn't want to listen...to a lot of things. I guess his daddy...or uncle...couldn't tell him nothin' neither, and eventually somethin' was gonna happen to him....so Marcus gave me the call. I ended up makin' some phone calls myself and I ended up comin' down...dealin' with the situation, dealin' with rumors...tryin' to set up a meetin' ...with

Marcus and them, with this neighborhood, and...tryin' to find out what the details was and how we can resolve the issue without it goin' into a retaliation and a war...I talked to the family, and the family was sayin' like, this is a family thing...So, you take on the elements of what's goin' on...and the concern of the family. You know, a lot of times, people respect for the family wishes... they pretty much sayin' this is a family issue and we gonna handle this. So, they didn't bring the gangs involved...as a war...we settled that by just sayin' that this happened. (Anthony, personal communication, January 24, 2014).

In this type of circumstance, it is not readily evident whether violence is domestic or gang-related in nature, and these intervention workers were able to work together to prevent gang retaliation to a family issue.

These workers also did additional rumor control and follow-up to the shooting. One intervention worker explains that the rival neighborhood was spreading rumors that his gang was perpetuating violence and he and his counterpart worked together to quell these rumors.

Now...other rumors was... 'Oh! The Southside Sloggers and the other neighborhoods is comin' through here, tryin' to shoot at us,' blah-blah-blah. Like, we ain't been over there. So, Marcus had to verify that and Marcus was just sayin' that, 'Man, I was just over there in their neighborhood on a Father's Day event. I was, talkin' to the real dudes that's runnin' their neighborhoods'. And... he said they wasn't the Southside Sloggers... a lot of it is like a trust factor... we have to trust each other word... and our commitment to the cause of what we tryin' to do... so my side and my story was genuine to Marcus... 'It wasn't us'... once that happened, then we have to work on the funeral arrangement, and

we have to work on the safe passage for the re-pass. (Anthony, personal communication, January 24, 2014).

Clearly, this type of communication and mediation was only possible because of the established trust and relationship between these two outreach workers as well as their influence in their respective former gangs. Not only did they have to trust each other to be truthful during their information gathering, but also they continued to partner after the shooting to control rumors and provide safe passage for the young man's funeral.

In addition to working with their counterparts from rival neighborhoods to manage crises, street outreach workers are often faced with violence and retaliation issues that hit very close to home. These individuals essentially are on call around the clock in a dangerous field and must be prepared to be a living example to their own families in addition to the communities they serve. One outreach worker shares his personal experience with violence and the opportunity he had to teach his child how to respond appropriately to the incident:

When I got shot...when my son seen me, I could see the look in his face... 'cause... some Latino shot me, and his best friend was Latino, and I could look at him and tell that anger was in him like he wanted to hurt all of 'em. And, I told him... 'Hey, listen. You can't blame him for what happened to me. Whoever did this to me, don't have nothin' to do with him, and I don't want you to lose your friendship over him or any other Latino...'Cause, whoever did this to me, they did it. You can't hold nobody else responsible for 'em, you know what I mean?' So, I really had to talk to him and keep him on a straight... path, you know? ... if I would have died, that conversation would have never happened. He would have grew up with that anger in him... and that happens a lot. (Marcus, personal communication, January 28, 2014).

He used his own victimization as a teaching moment with his son and advised him not to respond to this potentially racially charged event with blanket hatred and anger, but instead to stay on a “straight path” by remembering that people are ultimately responsible for their own choices and actions.

As a result of their personal histories and connections within their respective communities, intervention workers are uniquely situated to work with gang members and those involved in gang activity. Certainly, these individuals also have some level of interaction with law enforcement personnel, especially after shootings or killings. Though this relationship can be rather tenuous, there are law enforcement officials who recognize the clear benefits of having street outreach workers in their communities. A lieutenant states:

We have to kind of understand, and I’ve been around, I’ve been on this job for over 25 years, and I can tell you that my experience and...involvement with...gang members was very little with the exception of putting members in jail, (laughter) and actually doing...gang enforcement. And, seeing the difference that has been made... and kind of opening up to the idea that these people can help us... is something we can use to our benefit when it comes to getting out the word...and helping us solve some of these issues. (David, personal communication, March 27, 2014).

He has had a shift in both his interactions with and beliefs about gang members, or individuals with a history of gang involvement, and he indicates that some level of communication and cooperation can help “solve” some of the issues in the community. He further explains:

We do run into situations where there’s... gang members that are involved in crimes...but...we have to have a little bit of...understanding about where they’re coming from, what their background is, and many of these people, I honestly believe are

reformed. And, they want to do better...these are individuals that care about the community just as much as...some of us, if not more, because they've been born and raised in the community. They've seen the bad effects of what being a gang member... can bring to young people. I can't go around giving that testimony to young people, whereas they can. They can talk about...going to jail, or how it brings nothing but...pain to the families... the injuries that it caused to others... They have that relationship with these young people...they have access to people that we don't have access to... I think we're much stronger by using them to...reach out to these young people. (David, personal communication, March 27, 2014).

Interestingly, he highlights the ways in which reformed gang members have access to the youth in the community in a way that law enforcement do not and perhaps never will. Street outreach workers can give personal testimonies to these youth and relate to them as mentors as opposed to the traditionally more adversarial role of law enforcement figures in these communities. The notion is that because youth can relate to intervention workers, these individuals can have a stronger impact on the choices the younger people make.

The law enforcement officials who have established some level of mutual respect with street outreach workers understand that these individuals walk a fine line as they maintain relationships with their respective former gangs. For this reason, intervention workers are not expected to be informants or snitches for law enforcement, as this would obliterate all credibility outreach workers must maintain in their communities. Instead, communication between intervention workers and law enforcement, albeit somewhat delicate in nature, can be used as a preventative measure and to help law enforcement focus attention in the actual problem areas. This lieutenant explains:

They're not informants by any means. But...we also understand that there is information to be obtained, and what I mean by that is they can often times tell us what the feud is related to. If we have their gang getting attacked by an outside gang, but we're not sure who it is, this may give us an opportunity to...go over there and do crime suppression... Or, reach out to other gang interventionists...we are allowed to do so much more by the intelligence that we receive, simply by knowing where it's coming from... maybe there was a feud that started out with a party that wasn't even here... related to something that occurred completely separate from here...that all came back over here. Having those relationships really gives us a heads-up on whether or not we need to be concerned... worried that there's gonna be a retaliation...it allows us to be more effective in where we deploy our assets and what we do with them. (David, personal communication, March 27, 2014).

Considering how quickly retaliatory violence can occur between rival gangs, it helps both street outreach workers and law enforcement personnel to know the root causes of violent incidents and it improves the likelihood of effective responses of all involved.

Ultimately, street outreach workers can have a positive impact on violence reduction in their communities based upon how they handle conflicts. They need to be proactive in relationship building to prevent violence, and they must work quickly and act according to their training protocols to respond to crises, gather information, control the spread of rumors, and ultimately prevent retaliatory killings after the occurrence of violent incidents. With these efforts, many street outreach workers have established mutual respect with law enforcement. According to this lieutenant:

The gang interventionists do...a heck of a lot...in persuading some of the gangs not to get involved in retaliations... they definitely have a positive effect on that, and I've seen it... I know that they're effective with...what they're doing, and they're a big part of our reaching out to making sure that...the gangs that they're involved with, and that they have those relationships with, are getting the information that we need passed on to them... 'Hey, let the police do their job.' We don't need... their...buddies to be arrested and sent away for life for committing a murder in retaliation for something...the common response to... any type of offense that was done... robberies...stolen cars...girls - always a big part of the...feuds that go on... people putting things on social media and somebody feels disrespected. (David, personal communication, March 27, 2014).

He clearly recognizes the unique impact street outreach workers can make in their neighborhoods based on the relationships they have with community residents, including both gang and non-gang members. This allows for more effective policing efforts as well as more positive outcomes for community members. He even states that gang members have fewer arrests for retaliatory violence due to the dedicated efforts of intervention workers.

**Schools.** Another realm in which street outreach workers operate is in school areas where much of the violence between youth occurs, or at least begins (and then carries on later into the day). Intervention workers are keenly aware of what signs to look for and can spot trouble brewing often before school staff members realize what might transpire. Schools are often situated in areas where gang activity is prevalent as this intervention worker points out:

We call it hot spots... where all the gang violence be at...so most of these schools is... around some of these hot spots. ...we had school police... givin' us update on all the schools that's pretty fucked up. Havin' a lot of fights and gang issues... that's where the

intervention come into play. That's why Anthony said we got to get an update from the schools, see what school needs what... 'Cause a lot of schools... never extended their hands for intervention to work with 'em. That's somethin' that we just went out there and forced upon 'em 'cause to this day, they still have problems. (A'Don, personal communication, July 15, 2014).

He goes on to explain that simply hiring security staff does not appear to be effective in combating these issues in these neighborhood schools because this type of work requires a unique experience and specific training:

But, they got outside security, inside security, paid security. They got security up the ass but it's not makin' a difference. It's not scratchin' the surface. It's probably makin' a difference on campus but like with the junior high kids, they like to fight away from the school. The high school kids, they will fight right in the classroom in front of the teachers or somethin'... And, nine times out of ten... school staff is not prepared for violence like that and fights... in the class or outside the class, especially if it's outside the class, they gonna walk to the gate and watch them kids walk down the street, which I have seen many a times before. And, I asked their own security like, 'How do y'all deal with the situation without gettin' the parents, lettin' us know that your kids around here fightin'?' They say, 'Call 9-1-1.' I said, 'Okay, you tryin' to give a junior high kid already a felony before you get to high school.' I mean, how's that workin'?' (A'Don, personal communication, July 15, 2014).

As he notes, outreach workers are equipped to prevent or perhaps interrupt fights and other incidents and are also accustomed to interacting with parents of youth who are acting out. This not only keeps school areas safer but can also prevent youth from being arrested and potentially

charged with a felony. Essentially, interventionists not only play a vital role in helping to diffuse violent situations, but on a broader scale, their work interrupts the criminalization process for youth in these communities and helps reduce the funneling of youth through the school to prison pipeline.

Often, intervention workers are willing to put themselves in precarious situations in order to reduce violence and keep youth safe. One outreach worker describes an example of what can potentially happen when he intervenes in fights:

We done broke up a lot of fights. I been maced a few times and stuff. It eliminated a kid from goin' to jail though... assault charge, kids gettin' kicked out their school and stuff, you know? (A'Don, personal communication, July 15, 2014).

He clearly indicates that the ability to protect a youth from a possible expulsion, arrest, or jail time is worth even his own physical discomfort. Ultimately, for many outreach workers, the benefit of intervening in risky or dangerous situations outweighs the potential costs they may face.

Though some schools recognize the value of having street outreach workers show presence in the perimeters both before and after school hours, there are other schools that show resistance to this idea or do not acknowledge the value in it. Additionally, many schools do not allow the intervention workers to come inside school grounds because most interventionists have criminal histories that include felony convictions. This is unfortunate, because as one worker points out, street credibility is of utmost important to youth, and outreach workers could target the most at-risk young people and possibly address problems before matters escalate:

I guess they don't want to, bring up the thing that they have a problem...but when you don't... recognize you have a problem, it hurts the kids and it hurts the school, period...

you have individual teams that could go into them schools that it's in their community, and deal with 'em... I would like to get a classroom where the knuckleheads at... 'Cause, we have 'em everywhere... the teacher or the principal or somebody can identify them and have 'em come to our class and start havin' some real dialogue with 'em... Lettin' know which road they goin' down, and just what can happen, and just get to... their needs, basically, what's goin' on for them, 'cause it's somethin'. It could be their daddy missin' - he might be dead. It could be a number of things... that never was addressed 'cause...they bein' overlooked" (Marcus, personal communication, January 28, 2014).

He acknowledges the fact that many young people may act out as a result of existing personal or family issues and the sometimes a conversation, or series of conversations, may be sufficient to counteract these problems. Street outreach workers could partner with the schools to work with the "knuckleheads" or the students who are experiencing some type of difficulty and could perhaps prevent the youth from heading down a path of negative behavior. Certainly in the schools where the presence of street outreach workers is welcomed and routine, positive outcomes are evident. One intervention worker states:

But, once we got in there and they started seein' our work, and they started seein' how the kids, their grades started going up, their attendance rates start goin' up, once they start seeing that, they're like, 'Okay. This is working. This is working.' There's less fights on the way home from school, on the way to school. There's less problems around the school because of... our presence. (Darien, personal communication, March 6, 2014).

Overall, street outreach workers can help monitor school areas, build meaningful, mentoring relationships with youth, and help these young people make healthy choices and demonstrate

positive behaviors. Again, this not only helps build youths' strengths, but it also helps them avoid the harmful consequences of strictly punitive or suppressive interventions.

**Safe passage.** Another important component in street outreach work is safe passage negotiation. In neighborhoods where multiple gangs exist, gang members inevitably enter rival territories at various points throughout the day. This could be simply to pass from a point of origin to a destination or it could be as a means to engage in more nefarious activities. For this reason, street outreach workers focus on certain areas and negotiate individuals' rights of passage as well as protecting potential victims from harm. One intervention worker describes how important this is near school grounds:

In the schools... Safe passage...is basically... presence...of individuals that come there to... resolve issues, and keep... the local gangs from robbin' and stealin' from the kids around the school area. Around the safe zone area.... when that Safe Passage individual meets up with the gang in that area, which they have relationship with, and they comin' there to do somethin' wrong... the Safe Passage guy could talk to 'em and tell 'em that, you know, 'Y'all could cut that...' and then... they'll leave the situation alone. They won't do anything. (Anthony, personal communication, January 24, 2014).

In this scenario, outreach workers protect children from victimization as they move to and from school. The key to this component of street outreach is once again that the worker has an established relationship with the neighborhood gangs; without this respect and the ability to communicate, these efforts would be futile.

Another type of safe passage negotiation exists specifically to keep all residents safe, both gang and non-gang members. One intervention worker discusses how the mere presence of

a gang member in a rival territory without the necessary prior arrangements for safe passage can signal the intention to commit violence:

We've done some...peace mediations...we've done like about four big gangs...now, they don't...rival with each other. You know, if they see each other, it's just...passing through...they stay out ...the back streets of the different neighborhoods of different gangs... we had it to where if you're from a certain gang, you only stay on the main streets of travel...You don't go into the community...because if you come into the community, that means you're looking for something. You're trying to hurt someone, or you're trying to do somethin' that you know you're not supposed to be around here. And if for any reason, you needed to go in that community, you will contact someone from that community to give you that right of passage...that was the way of keeping a peace because...the hair on the back of your neck wouldn't raise up like, 'Hey, why is this person over?' (Darien, March 6, 2014).

Essentially, street outreach workers know the expectations and protocols for how an individual can and should move through rival neighborhoods. They work to mediate between gangs and clarify the more neutral zones for travel as well as to provide advance notice of when an enemy may appear in rival gang territory. This not only protects gang members but also other residents who may be in the area or in the surrounding environments. Open lines of communication help intervention workers to keep the relevant parties informed and to set clear expectations.

**Community building.** Street outreach workers are instrumental in community building activities in their respective neighborhoods. Once they have implemented the necessary violence reduction efforts and have established some level of mediation or peace treaties between rival gangs in the area, they can strategize about methods to continue building communication and

trust between neighborhoods. In many cases, as one outreach worker describes, this involves organizing social activities where residents can engage in positive interactions with one another:

In our neighborhood, we got somethin' to offer them. We have this intervention, this whole thing goin' on - field trips, sports programs, you know, even without them, we still have somethin' goin' on at the park... we all put somethin' together - softball game, barbeque... That's givin' back to the community. You know we take a life from the community, we give back a life. We donated to the park and recreation... get into a lot of these people in their churches and their organizations, but... from the streets and we done gave more back to the community then actually we took. 0101-2, page 32]

He notes that this is one clear way to begin to atone for the harmful or violent behavior of his own past as well as create new options for community building in the future.

Creating opportunities for community residents to interact can be particularly useful for healthy child development in these neighborhoods. Street outreach workers note that children in these communities often grow up within an extremely adversarial framework. Engaging in activities and events in neighborhood parks can expose children to each other in a healthy way and encourage prosocial behavior. According to one intervention worker:

What we're doing now is bringing them... the two parks, the one that's in our community and the other that's in the other community, we're startin' to have like games with each other, so the kids will meet now before they get to the age of where they want to clash with each other. We're startin' to have events... where the kids... mingle with each other. And, wouldn't see them so much as a rival, they will see them more as, 'Hey, I know this kid. I will stand up for this kid... we came from the sandbox together,' you know? So... by doing that, we're just killing all of the... monotony of, 'That's my enemy'... That

sense of..., 'I don't get along with that person just because of what has happened before even I was born... So... we'll just find the similarities where they could come together, the common ground, and just break bread with each other... That common ground where they could say, 'Man, you're just like me. I ride skateboards just like you do... I like to play that... sport just like you do.' And, it's really up to us because like if we don't do it, the system would definitely keep a divided line. (Darien, personal communication, March 6, 2014).

As he points out, introducing children from different neighborhoods or different schools to each other at a young age can help prevent some of the animosity toward "rivals" many experience as they age in these communities. Street outreach workers can host activities that help children and youth not view each other as "enemies," but, instead, relate to each other as acquaintances or even friends.

An important component of community building is to ensure buy-in from community residents. Street outreach workers coordinate across gang lines to involve stakeholders in these neighborhoods in the community building process. One worker provides an example of how community relations improvements are evident when gangs are permitted to attend events or perhaps even assist in hosting events in rival territories:

In my local area, I have a great relationship with [Marcus's intervention organization]...which was...a rival set to us...and a lot of other people say they can do a collaborative effort. To me...once you can have show of support, show of...that...collaboration piece...when we had the Christmas event at our park, we asked for [Marcus's organization's] help. They came out 25/30 deep...and support us...that showed real collaboration 'cause their neighborhood was in our park. And, pretty much...

in anybody neighborhood, you don't let no enemies up in your park...but we wanted to show that we can work together, and we can get along, and we can settle our differences. So...it was collaboration at it's best...to make sure that... my gang that I'm from, is...comfortable with that, first of all...and second of all, that they comin' in for peace not violence. They comin' in to serve the community...then also they comin' in for the kids...who want to hurt somebody that tryin' to serve kids, you know? (Anthony, personal communication, January 24, 2014).

He explains that even by allowing “enemies” to coexist at an event, the neighborhoods are showing an improvement in the level of trust, relationships, and cooperation. One invention worker gives another example of how engaging residents in these efforts empowers the community to take ownership of, and pride in, making improvements in neighborhood relations:

So, that activity of gang war, that mentality of gangs just keeps starin', keeps starin', until a point of... gang ceasefires or peace treaties or whatever you want to call it, understandin', to where there is less activity. And then we put in resources like our events, our Christmas events... and bringin' family gatherin's... and social gatherin's, and community gatherin's, there in the park... where guys can be able to bring their kids out and say, 'Man, this is much safer than it used to be, and I could bring my kids out to the park.' ...and then creating that, a way that they help and assist in reducin' the violence... in the community. They're playin' a part of it... so they takin' ownership... 'We have somethin' to do with this. We have somethin' to do to reduce this violence.' ... and that's showin' pride to the community that... guys really want to step up and try to take ownership of reducin' the violence. (Anthony, personal communication, January 24, 2014).

As he highlights, community empowerment in his environment is really an inside-out process, and sustaining long-term, positive neighborhood relations requires efforts from the stakeholders within those given neighborhoods.

## **Chapter 4. Street Outreach: What Does It Take?**

The street outreach and intervention field is unique, and my interviews show that these on-the-ground workers have clear views about what it takes to do this work well, and why this might be the case. According to these individuals, there are certain indispensable personal characteristics for individuals who wish to work in this area. They indicate that given the nature of the work, interventionists must have close ties to their communities, including a high level of respect from neighborhood residents; they must have an insider perspective on what their target communities need; they must demonstrate deep commitment to their work; and they must have a balance of personal experience and professionalization in their repertoire.

### **License to Operate**

The first crucial characteristic for outreach workers is a “license to operate” (hereafter, LTO) which is essentially a high level of respect or street credibility in the target neighborhood and often in surrounding areas. A street outreach worker must have an LTO so community residents will respect his or her opinion and permit the worker to speak on behalf of the neighborhood. As this outreach worker explains:

LTO is havin’ that respect...from your neighborhood...and from...other neighborhoods that’s out there...to give your opinion, and to hear you... And, either they can...disagree or agree. It doesn’t matter. But, the respect is there...to where you could be heard and listened to... A lot of guys be like, ‘Man, get the hell out of here...I don’t care where you from,’ you know? So, the... respect... you have, and the way you approach people, and people hear about what you’re doin’... allow you to come in...and to speak... on behalf of... your neighborhood or whatever... license to operate is... when there’s conflicts and...some resolution that need to be made, that individual could be called out to resolve

those issues... talkin' to the neighborhood...you can go back to the neighborhood and gather information from them... and be that mediator or ...ambassador per se... And then once the agreement is made, then the set-up of bringin' those that need to be brought together and let them see each other, and be able to hear...both sides... And then ... it's resolved. (Anthony, personal communication, January 24, 2014).

He highlights that an LTO does not necessarily mean that others agree with a given opinion in certain situations. However, the ability to approach community residents and discuss matters with them in a way that they are able to hear and respect is fundamental to intervention work. The outreach worker often acts as a mediator between community members, both gang and non-gang affiliated. This means he or she<sup>2</sup> must be willing and able to listen to opposing sides of the same story and assist community members to reach some agreement. This ability to communicate and mediate is crucial in this field. As one individual explains, intervention workers must be trained in effective dialogue methods:

So, it's about bein' the leadership, bein' accountable...in your community. You know, bein' that stakeholder...we had to go through all that trainin' ... prevention/intervention, get an understandin' how to dialogue and all that. That's what Brothers Academy [an intervention and outreach training organization] was mainly about...it's a must that you take these classes...that's the whole part of ... havin' the right people on your team ...And, mostly when we at these meetin's, 'Do you know such and such? Can you get on the phone and call him and see if he can make anything happen?' (A'Don, personal communication, July 15, 2014).

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<sup>2</sup> Both men and women work as interventionists; because the majority of the outreach workers associated with PACE are males, I focused on their perspective in the current study.

Individuals with an LTO are able to take leadership roles in their communities and are identified as the people who can influence situations and obtain results. This is important because in addition to working as mediators between neighborhood residents, intervention workers must be able to impact criminal activity in their respective communities. One street outreach worker shares his perspective:

Everybody know who the goons is in the neighborhood - the shooters, the dope dealers... That's that part, license to operate. You can't control your goons then you shouldn't be at the table. (A'Don, personal communication, July 15, 2014).

His claim is very matter-of-fact: Intervention workers will not be effective in their neighborhoods if they cannot exert some level of influence over community members of all kinds including the “goons” or crime and gang involved individuals. This is clearly a job that not just anyone is qualified to do. This is not an easy task; it takes special qualities and personal influence to be able to “control the goons” in a given neighborhood.

Specifically, with an LTO, street outreach workers are able to reduce violence, including gang wars. This could happen by using mediation techniques in some cases. It could also be the result of a process that starts with something as simple as a phone call in other cases. These individuals know the key players to contact in a variety of scenarios; if they are not able to intervene directly in a gang war or conflict, they know who is in a position to do so, as this worker states:

That part...license to operate... with these gang wars goin' on right now, bein' able to make a phone call...and stop that, that's where that license to operate comes in the picture. But, a lot of these guys don't get the recognition or appreciation that they deserve...how do you compensate somebody with that type of power? ... It's kind of

scary at the same time... you gotta have a lot heart to stick your neck out there like that... known out here on these streets... The county jail. The juvenile hall detention center... And, that's that... license to operate, you know people in different areas, neighborhoods and stuff that can make things happen... All the right people in the right places. (A'Don, personal communication, July 15, 2014).

He notes that with this ability and influence comes great risk. Street outreach workers are willing “to stick their necks out” for their communities and assume a certain level of risk in order to interrupt the cycle of violence. Intervention workers are known and respected in their communities as well as in carceral settings. They have credibility with community members across a variety of environments and this allows them to intervene in conflict situations, including gang wars. He further explains:

Like when these wars jump off... and they just keep goin' and keep goin', somebody will get on the phone like, 'Hey man, what's goin' on in your neighborhood?' And that's when Marcus's like, 'Man, that ain't my neck of the woods but man, I been talkin' to these dudes over there'... 'cause like Marcus got a big neighborhood...he only probably represent one of those...neighborhood...But, since he a Rumsey Boy [this gang is represented by several different neighborhoods], he got to represent all of 'em, and he got to represent 'em right, too... Can't fall short on 'em, just like it was his neighborhood. And, it's pretty much the same thing with the Brick 20's. One Brick 20 speak about Brick business... But, that's the whole part, like I'm gonna call you to this meetin' 'cause I know... he plays a good part, he's effective. You got some people that's not effective, you got some people that is effective(A'Don, personal communication, July 15, 2014).

Certainly, it takes someone with a unique position of influence to impact the community on such a broad scale. Though there is a certain type and level of training that can help facilitate intervention workers' responsibilities and tasks in their field, the LTO is typically developed over time and is based on personal experiences and behavior. For many individuals, this respect or street credibility is based on what used to be community members' intimidation or fear. One intervention worker uses one of his role models as an example:

My boss, Elijah, said, 'I used to be the problem and now I'm the solution.' It's become a motto...this is an individual that...I used to, growin' up, met him when he was gangbangin', you better be ready...But now when you meet this man...he come with nothin' but love and a lot of respect... That's what a commander be lookin' for is people with a lot of experience like that and knowledge like that, 'cause like what Calvin [a law enforcement official] was sayin', you could sit down with somebody and look in their eyes and tell... what they made of...especially if they done killed somebody. You know, they done been through a lot - you can just see it in their eyes. (A'Don, personal communication, July 15, 2014).

This illustrates the way street outreach workers are able to use their violent pasts for a positive purpose moving forward. The idea is that intervention workers can use their knowledge and experiences from past gang involvement to maintain the necessary connections with gang and other influential community members to affect change in their respective neighborhoods. One street outreach worker states:

License to operate, for... us gang members... it's how... violent... you were, when we was gang bangin', it was recognized that your homeboys, and your enemies also, and

with that we got LTOs from bein' incarcerated and stuff like that...that's one way of gettin' your LTOs. (Marcus, personal communication, January 28, 2014).

Having an LTO involves the process of both having "been through a lot" as well as learning from it and moving past it. In a sense, many of these individuals who were once part of the problem have become part of the solution. Interestingly, he further explains that although a gang-involved past is a particularly common way to earn an LTO, it is not the only way this can happen. A person can have an LTO based on a history of community activism; he or she must have demonstrated the desire and ability to strengthen the community in some specific way. He informs:

One way you can get it from your community. If you's a person that grew up in your community, that looked out for your community, that helped, that's... another way your community give you LTOs...showed that you just wasn't there destroyin' it, you was also bringin' help and resources, and helpin' people. So, that's another way of gettin' it. And then, you know...just showin' the community that you care about 'em. (Marcus, personal communication, January 28, 2014).

Regardless of how an intervention worker earns the LTO, it is vital in this line of work. Street outreach workers must have both strong ties to and respect in their communities. They often develop these as a result of their involvement with gangs. But even for those who were not gang members, they must have some kind of proven loyalty to their respective communities. The LTO is what allows them to impact conflict or other issues. One worker advises:

Now, a person that don't have license to operate, get the hell out of here. You ain't nobody. You can't speak for, amongst us. You ain't been around here. The person that has the license to operate must have some relationship within that community area. I

don't really have to be from Southside Sloggers. I can be loved, I could be grew up in that neighborhood, loved by everybody, and be well respected. But, that's the key thing - well respected... everybody respect me on that level, then they be like, 'Man, let him do that. Let him do that.' ... As far as what I've been doin' and reachin' all the way to the penitentiary, to where people's hearin' what I'm doin' ... some of my guys sittin' on death row and some of 'em doin' life... and they agree like, you know, it's about time we got somethin' goin' on like this, man... givin' back, and... doin' the right things... makin' sure our kids is safe in our neighborhoods... I believe that... we can change our community... I remember there was a bike patrol... that was placed over there by Robeson High [a continuation high school], and none of these dudes weren't from that neighborhood. And, you can't talk to these youngsters. You don't even know 'em. And, they ain't gonna be respectin' you like that. So, you got to get those individuals that live in that community and be real respected and say, 'Hey, I want y'all to stop robbin' these kids runnin' from, from the school.' You know, and they be like, 'Oh, alright big homie.'

(Anthony, personal communication, January 24, 2014).

This indicates the potentially somewhat fluid nature of crime in these communities; occasionally, outreach workers – if they have earned a certain level of respect – are able to reduce crime simply by talking to people. Notably, he states that without an LTO, an individual “ain't nobody” in these communities. Both strong community ties and a deep level of respect are required for outreach workers. Often, they are responsible for speaking on behalf of the community, particularly as it relates to helping to control criminal activity, both gang and non-gang related. From a young age, residents of these communities learn that only certain people are to be trusted. For this reason, it can be particularly problematic to bring in “outsiders” to effect change. These

street outreach workers note the importance of community ties and respect in reaching residents of these target communities.

Clearly, the LTO gives outreach workers a very specific type of influence in their communities. With this position comes great responsibility; street outreach workers are held to a certain standard and must conduct themselves accordingly. One worker explains:

That's why we, I got to set an example... I can't be an intervention worker, out there in the streets, if I still be sellin' drugs, they can be lookin' at me, they gonna be still tryin' to sell drugs... And at the same time, I got to set an example just like I do... in my house and stuff. I got to do the same in the street. (A'Don, personal communication, July 15, 2014).

Outreach workers are admired by many in their communities and must live as examples, especially to the younger generations. They must avoid any activities that could negatively influence neighborhood residents and must hold themselves to a higher standard since they are essentially in leadership roles and have the ability to impact others in such a unique way.

Ultimately, outreach workers must have an LTO not only within their target communities, but also with additional social networks and other resources to work toward community empowerment. Ideally, they will develop relationships within the public safety system, economic and political spheres, and with other key players who might be able to assist them in their community improvement efforts. According to this intervention expert who has over 40 years of experience in the street outreach and intervention field:

Truly to be effective in total community...intervention, you've got to have LTOs not only in your sphere of expertise, you've got to have LTOs with municipalities... with safety...venues...with...shot callers [i.e., those who are respected and have influence in

their respective agencies and venues] outside of a venue, economic...regenerators, etc. Now, this is the key, and...most people don't realize...in all these venues, you have to be able to go in there as equal... You don't go in there in a subservient position. What am I talking about? Let's say you got a city funded venue and you got city funded interventionists who are on the city payroll, they're gonna be very limited when they go into a conversation with other city agencies etc., in terms of tellin' them what needs to be done and how to do it because of the simple fact that they're under the confines of...the city coffer. (Rasheed, personal communication, October 14, 2014).

He highlights the importance of thinking and planning on a large scale in order to impact deep-rooted community issues. Certainly this process requires that outreach workers have the necessary LTO in the target communities to reduce or stop the violence and establish some level of stability. But he also notes the importance of the ability to navigate other relevant entities and systems as an "equal". In this sense, he recognizes that street intervention workers must be able to partner with other organizations and key players in community transformation efforts, but this cannot happen if interventionists are in "subservient" roles. Rather, each entity deserves respect for its input and expertise. Thus, this is a key element of what "collaboration" means in practice, and this type of credibility is an essential element in this work as it plays out on the ground.

### **Insider Perspective on Community Needs**

Another vital personal characteristic for individuals who wish to work in the intervention field is an insider perspective on and understanding of what a given community needs. The idea is that the community should identify what it needs, and having street outreach workers with the LTO as members of these target communities helps ensure buy-in from early on in the change process. It is not a matter of bringing in outside entities to drive the process, but, instead,

intervention workers help these target communities determine needs and issues and implement strategies to address them. One outreach expert explains:

It has to be ground up and community driven. You're not gonna go into a community and tell that community...what it needs, and tell that community how to drive the process. First of all, if the community is not involved, you're not gonna get owners. And, everybody who owns...something...understands once they own it, they have a tendency to appreciate and take care of it more. Same thing with the process of change - if it's community driven, and the input is coming from the community, now, all the input doesn't have to come from the community, but the driving catalyst has to come from the community. Really what governmental agencies and what so called experts who are not within a given region... All these other entities comin' in, they should be comin' in as support mechanisms. They should be comin' in to give that community the ability to drive itself to the end process. Not tryin' to take control or owners of the process. And this is where so many communities go wrong. (Rasheed, personal communication, October 14, 2014).

Again, he further stresses the importance of working from within the community to effect change. This requires the ability and willingness to listen the target communities' perspective on its goals and objectives instead of simply relying on personal experience and opinions. The key is for outreach workers to hear from the target neighborhoods and then assist with resource provision. He advises:

The community has told us what they need to make themselves whole. Without that community process...we're shootin' in the dark thinkin' we know what all of our past experience, etc. That community will tell you what I need to get myself whole. If I can

get these things on board, for the most part, I'm gonna be able to function. And, if you listen and have the options to provide some of those things, you're gonna be successful" (Rasheed, personal communication, October 14, 2014).

Street outreach workers have close ties to the communities in which they work, which makes them especially appropriate figures to help communities identify their most pressing concerns. Many of them grew up in these neighborhoods, which can give them a certain level of insider knowledge and understanding of the neighborhood concerns. These identified needs should actually drive the community revitalization process, as this outreach expert clarifies:

If you're gonna truly be effective in...this type of work...your community needs...are gonna drive the process. And, in most communities and especially besieged communities, there's gonna be a multitude of given needs...A key to being effective in community revitalization or...restoration is to provide that community with systems that drive the process... most people are so emotionally reactive that they act in the moment. What truly makes change is a systematic infrastructure that supersedes the individual or the group that brings it to the table. (Rasheed, personal communication, October 14, 2014).

He notes that many of the problems in these target communities pertain to crisis situations, and he explains that it is necessary to move from crisis-response to preventative measures as soon as possible once the community has determined its needs. Typically, in these communities, there are several identified needs at any given time. For this reason, intervention workers must have the ability to be flexible, think on their feet, and respond to crises, as well as organize networks and systems to help prevent future crises. He states:

So, if ...a community...identifies, let's say, five prevalent needs, my goal is to find a system that not only will deal with that need, but also keep that need from reoccurring in

the future. And then what you would want to do is combine as many systems as you can to create a collaborative network...and the ability to duplicate becomes inherent...Community engagement, violence restoration, violence reduction, hostility abatement...the whole gamut...psychological transformation...is a live process... you're constantly putting tools in that toolbox. You're constantly finding continual options because one thing does not work for...everybody, so you're constantly movin' forward. (Rasheed, personal communication, October 14, 2014).

This transitions street outreach and community intervention work from being reactive to more proactive in nature. Crisis response is crucial, but for true community growth and improvement, street outreach workers must not only interrupt the cycle of violence but must also assist communities in establishing a new standard of functioning. An intervention worker explains the need to move past crisis-response thinking and actually put systems in place to help prevent these crises from reoccurring:

See, we focus on the wrong thing. We focus on...the physical, or the manifestation of the crisis and the moment. We've got to look for the actions, the behaviors, and the characteristics that are prevalent usually in these situations over and over and over. And then from there, you start to build your system to counterbalance what those actions, and characteristics, and behaviors are... that doesn't mean you're creating a blue print for each of these communities; what you're doing, though, is creating the skeletal structure to start from that you take to any besieged community ...the community will define its given needs and then based on your being on the ground from a practitioner's approach, you're able to also look for...inherent indicators on your own. So, you got three things at this point you're workin' with. You're workin' with what the community has said.

You're workin' with the commonality of the red flags that you've seen...And then you're workin' from your reference points based on your feet on the ground. (Rasheed, personal communication, October 14, 2014).

The process for community transformation is complex and comprises many stages. An intervention worker describes a five-level process that helps promote community change. He notes that violence reduction or "stopping the blood flow" must be first, as this addresses the crisis at hand. Then, key players must identify the necessary structural components for sustaining this level of stability. This will involve the implementation of psychological and other prosocial thinking and behavioral resources. He provides information about each of the required steps for community change:

The first is stoppin' the hostility, reducin' the violence, eradicating the blood flow. Secondly, it's creating a structure of options that create sustainability for that... your third level, is bringing in options for the psychological transformation of why people are usin' violence in the first place...and get those individuals to accept some pro social...agenda, lastly is the bigger piece - now you've got to create the systematic infrastructure that allows for not only the people to change the mindset to stop using the violence, but... create continual options to drive the process, which...allows the community to become a self-determinate community, to move itself forward and become violence free. (Rasheed, personal communication, October 14, 2014).

Intervention workers must be able to think and work in multiple dimensions; at the base level, they need to be able to address the immediate crisis, but they must also have an understanding of the perhaps more abstract level of systemic change that is needed to create lasting community improvements. Ultimately, this discussion of the necessity of addressing community-identified

needs in order to help these neighborhoods become “self-determinate, violence-free” environments illuminates the importance of community change occurring from the inside out for these target areas. Street outreach workers must understand this notion as they help communities move forward in reaching their respective goals.

### **Deep Commitment**

Street outreach work requires flexibility and essentially round the clock availability not often required in more traditional types of employment. In addition to the necessary LTO and insider perspective on the target community, street outreach workers need to be able to make a long-term commitment to the work, and demonstrate a willingness to form lasting connections with neighborhood residents in many situations. One outreach worker describes the process for how an individual can become an interventionist:

First step should always be trainin’...a 16-week program...when they finish with that... they can shadow us and see... how we do it... if it’s Safe Passage... and when we go to incidents, you know, what’s our role there...Not to cross the yellow tape... just to get the information and deal with rumor control, first of all, and bring in resources like grief counselin’ and stuff like that. And, that’s what we really need to back us, is that grief counselin’ ... to come into the homes... if the family want it. They might not want it at that moment, but weeks down the line, months down the line, everybody gone and you just dealin’ with that... that hole in ... your heart, then you have to come back and, ‘Hey, you know, I’m still here, you know? If you need somebody to talk to, we here.’ ‘Cause, it, it’ll come a year later but it’s gonna come...you gotta believe it. It gotta be somethin’ you want to do... you can’t look at it as like you just want a check. It gotta be somethin’ that you really believe in doin’ ‘cause it gonna take a lot of your time from your house,

from your family... it's a job that's required 24/7. You know, have what it takes... and you gotta be, really want to do it, willin' to do it. (Marcus, personal communication, January 28, 2014).

He explains how prospective interventionists must attend training sessions, shadow current interventionists in the field performing crisis response duties, mediation and rumor control, and then specifically advises that intervention workers must be prepared to offer long-term support to community members. He points out that after violent incidents, especially killings, neighborhood residents begin a grieving process that can go on for an extended period of time. Outreach workers must be prepared to offer support to these families long after the crises have subsided. As he highlights, intervention work requires a rather demanding schedule, since workers are essentially on-call at all times, day or night.

Even though this is an around-the-clock type of field, street outreach workers are not paid on a commensurate scale to other type of employment that compensate for overtime work or for longer, nontraditional work schedules. In this sense, this line of work requires a special kind of commitment; street outreach workers must believe so firmly in their cause that they are willing to work in what are often dangerous situations for wages that are typically considered lower than a living wage. This is especially problematic considering many of these individuals have families and other financial responsibilities. One worker indicates:

We've been tryin' to get resources in these areas but a lot of people's not lookin' to give us those resources... I've been on the same scale... since I left Life Through Unity [his original intervention organization]. Really, I was declined... got less money now... but I still do the work... that's why I took on another job in order to... keep my household and take care of stuff... I mean, if you want to do it, you'll find a way. You'll find a way to

make it happen. And, a lot of guys still...see me as one of the main guys in the intervention world, as a spokesperson for the intervention... but... even with the movie and the documentary comin' out, you know what I'm sayin', hoping that, that will shed some more light on us and maybe get some more resources in our area. (Anthony, personal communication, January 24, 2014).

As he indicates, intervention workers occasionally take pay cuts when they commit to intervention work. He, like many of his colleagues, works another job on the side to help fulfill his financial responsibilities. The current status of this field often requires that intervention workers commit to working in their communities prior to ensuring that the financial resources are in place. As he articulates, "If you want to do it, you'll find a way." Several outreach workers echo these sentiments. Another interventionist points out:

Some people all they worry about is their paycheck, you're not really being effective when you're working. And that's what's going on right now, like with intervention. With intervention workers, there's people that just sit in these meetings and talk – we can sit in meetings all day, and talk all day, unless you've got something to say in a training and stuff... And... I just don't like it. (A'Don, personal communication, October 29, 2013).

As he explains, intervention workers must be focused on their work responsibilities rather than their salaries. The work entails much more than a job. Rather, it is a lifestyle – and a mission of sorts. It requires deep-rooted commitment to the field and target neighborhoods as well as perseverance. This in turn can help bolster one's LTO because showing this type of deep commitment gains respect from the target community.

## **Professionalization**

Given the fact that the intervention field is only somewhat recently recognized and respected on some levels, it is not surprising that intervention workers are increasingly articulating the need to professionalize the field. It is not enough for workers to individually operate individually within their communities; rather, they must standardize procedures and coordinate with their counterparts in the target neighborhoods. They express the importance of this in order to create structure and a sense of unity within the profession. One interventionist with extensive experience working in street outreach informs:

The reason why you don't find information (laughter) out there is because...this work wasn't really respected until '92 after the revolts. I've been doin' the work for 43 years, long before it had a name. And, there's others out there that have also. But, that's part of the professionalism... when I'm looking at what you're doing and you say, 'Okay, you're a professional now,' - now the first thing I'm looking at is... what is...the standards of behavior in this work? What is the operational protocol...? ... How do they actually do what they do on the streets? (Rasheed, personal communication, October 14, 2014).

Another worker shares his perspective on becoming a team player in an intervention organization:

I got with Southwest Vitalizers [his intervention organization] to professionalize this because in being a loose cannon, just doing intervention, I'm spinning my wheels... It's just, I'm a lone person out there tryin' to say, 'Hey, man! Stop doin' that. Stop doin' that.' But, I have to get professionalized with doin' it because... it's a way of life. And, I have a family also... I have to take care of my... bills and everything... and professionalizing intervention... not that I'm looking for a paycheck, but I still got to take care of my family. And then there's a protocol that need to be set... that needed to be

followed...it just had to happen... because...you don't want to be renegade when you come to this. (Darien, personal communication, March 6, 2014).

He notes, of course, that he is concerned about being able to support his family, but that ultimately the intervention field must be professionalized because it is a “way of life.” He recognizes the importance of unifying with others of like mind in the field rather than being “renegade,” because it prevents him from “spinning his wheels” and allows him to follow clearly defined operating procedures.

The professionalization of the street outreach and intervention field entails the development of systematic procedures and protocols that can guide how outreach workers move in the neighborhoods and the ways they interact with each other and with other community members. It involves a plan for how they will respond to certain situations, clarifies expectations and increases consistency across a variety of potential scenarios. It is not sufficient for outreach workers to simply act upon their gut instincts or personal experiences when fulfilling their responsibilities. Instead, they must operate within a standardized structure so they know precisely what to do in a given scenario, as well as how their counterparts will behave. This consistency increases safety across the various dimensions of the field. One worker outlines his opinion on professionalization of street intervention:

What I mean by professionalizing the work is... in doing anything in life that you do, you want to have a system... makin' somethin' consistent... Once it's consistent, and once you're committed, you want it to keep goin'... a positive system... I'm gonna be dead and gone and it's still gonna be goin' on... professionalizing it, is... we have a protocol of the way we work, that works for our community... People gonna ... wanna know how do you do community intervention... the professional part about it is havin' a runnin'

law, per se... a book or, 'What did we do in this situation when it came up?' Or, 'What...we did in this area of work...when it was needed? And... what steps can we take if this was to arise again?' Instead of someone just goin' out there on a whim and just like, 'Hey, let's just handle it this way,' and then it don't work. (Darien, personal communication, March 6, 2014).

Professionalizing intervention work involves documenting actions and reactions clearly so that an individual can have a firm grasp on what transpired from the beginning to the end. In this sense, street outreach workers must be able to provide step-by-step explanations for how their work impacts violence reduction and community relations, among other things. Not only does this help outreach workers in their interactions with each other, but it also allows them to explain the nature of this field to outside entities. One street outreach worker states:

We're just documenting everything. So, we can always reference back, and that's the professional part of it... where I'm not just telling you, 'Hey, we did this... gang intervention over there and... those guys over there, they're good now. They're cool... they're hangin' out and just havin' a nice barbeque or somethin'.' But, we want to show the proof of how did it get to them hangin' and havin' a barbeque? When just some years ago... if they saw each other, they were pullin' out guns and knives... How did you get to that point? How... you were able to get a community to sit down with each other and break bread with each other? And, just have a civilized conversation? ....There's steps to this. (Darien, personal communication, March 6, 2014).

Another outreach worker supports this notion that intervention work is systematic and must be based on clear operating procedures:

Everything in the world of violence reduction is scientific transformation. This is no guess work. That's where your training becomes so important. People think they can go out there and just like in the world of gang violence. 'I know all the homies, I can talk to the homies, I can shut this situation down' - that's a bunch of bullshit. Excuse my French. You've got to look at and be able to apply scientific and strategic protocol that has been proven to diffuse a situation. (Rasheed, personal communication, October 14, 2014).

He clearly recognizes that anecdotal evidence and procedures are not sufficient in any professional field. He further explains that intervention work has been somewhat slow to become professionalized because of the volatility in the field and the complex nature of the work:

People do not like to deal with stuff they feel uncomfortable about - that's violence. So... the people in this work were allowed for...decades to say, 'We're the only ones that can do this work. We know all the homies. We got the relationships. So, bam!' A lot of people went along with that for years. And, finally when the work started to be accepted after the '92 revolt, well guess what? Those municipalities and those private funders, etc., started to say, 'Okay, well, we're willing to accept... we see the need. We see the purpose...now give us some structure.' There wasn't no structure...that's the reason we created [our training organization], to create structure. We wanted people to come in and say, 'Okay, you want to know about our work? First of all, here's our manual of operation... Here's our value system. Here's our skill set. (Rasheed, personal communication, October 14, 2014).

He explains that, historically, information about street intervention work has been very limited to those not directly involved in the field. As he points out, this was allowed because people are often reluctant to explore issues such as conflict or violence that make them uneasy or

uncomfortable. In this way, street outreach workers could rely on personal experience and relationships in their daily responsibilities without being required to give any sort of detailed accounts of their actions to outside entities. However, now that government and private agencies are increasingly recognizing the value of the street outreach and intervention field, and as funding sources are becoming more willing to back this profession, street outreach workers must work within a standardized structure and operate within an agreed upon system of procedures and protocols.

Professionalization is especially critical for the street outreach field because of the personal histories of many outreach workers. Many of these individuals have violent backgrounds characterized by gang and other criminal activity as well as imprisonment in many cases. For this reason, outreach workers often have to overcome many obstacles to garner desired support and respect from those outside the field. One interventionist explains how outreach workers often face great skepticism from outside entities due to past conduct:

We have some outstanding interventionists, we have some damn fools that I would bury. But, it's the same thing in any profession. It's the same thing in any profession. But, we're looked upon much, much harder because ...where most... came from, the culture, or the easy scapegoating...not to support the work...and that's why, gettin' back to that professionalism is so important, that we're able to show just what that looks like, you know? (Rasheed, personal communication, October 14, 2014).

Professionalization is also necessary for the safety of all who work in the intervention field. Street outreach workers believe their responsibilities and procedures need to be standardized to the point that they can anticipate how their colleagues will move in a given situation. The system of behavioral guidelines and protocols increases outreach workers' ability to anticipate each

other's actions in what are often split-second decision making situations. One outreach worker advises that he can assess the professionalism of his colleagues quickly and this helps him decide whether he can trust these individuals in the field:

Overall, when you get down to the brass tacks... how do you move into a situation? What do you do when the call comes in? What do you do enroute? What do you do on scene? What do you do in the egress? What do you do...in the debrief and the rewrite? ... If I'm an expert, which I am... in this work, in this field, I'm looking for that. You say you're professional, define how you move. Define your what, when, where, why, and how. And, make me understand that. I might not agree with it but make me understand that. That's what real professionalism is. And, if you can't do that, you're not a professional. I will chop you down in a second. I'll sit you down at this table in two minutes and tell what your capability is based on what you tell me your training protocol is. If you come in there with, 'Well, I know all the homies and we have relationships and we talk...,' I know within two seconds you don't know what the hell you're doin'. And, you gonna be a liability and get somebody seriously hurt...I gotta worry about you just as much in the engagement because you might be some damn loose cannon that doesn't know what you do. (Rasheed, personal communication, October 14, 2014).

Ultimately, the support systems outreach workers have developed have allowed them to reach a larger target population and address a greater breadth of needs within these communities.

Interventionists inform that they have a certain level and type of expertise, but that often they must identify additional resources and entities with whom they can collaborate in their efforts to reduce violence and transform communities. This outreach expert explains:

We've been successful because of the... networks we've created, where we can't be as effective as we maybe could... with the addition of outside help - we don't hesitate to bring that help in, and we'll work collaboratively with that individual entity or organization... we're experts at stoppin' violence, we're experts at... the community... foundation development, but we don't have all the answers for every situation. And, I'll be a damn fool to sit here and say we can do everything... But... because of the methodology that we use, we're far more successful than most groups combined because we have... a blueprint, we have a template, that we operate from. We are able to spot where we have breaches. We're able to locate where we have risk factors. We're able to... identify the degrees of training that are needed. (Rasheed, personal communication, October 14, 2014).

Another intervention worker shares his perspective on working with colleagues in a clearly defined structure as opposed to working as a lone interventionist in the field:

You'll find more people against you than with you if you're alone, a lonesome... renegade intervention worker... but when you come with a team of people that's like-minded, you'll find you'll reach more people... Because our... vision... is straight to the point. This is what we're gonna do, this is what we're about, we're not gonna deviate... Now, people respect that, so they know it's clear-cut and that's it... So, with... being with Southwest Vitalization it's like family because we all come from this community. So, we know the need... and it's not something that we have to sit and have a meetin' about and talk about. We all lived it. We all... know what it is without even speakin'.

(Darien, personal communication, March 6, 2014).

Clearly, street outreach and intervention work is in a process of ongoing evolution and development. Though historically individuals in this field primarily relied heavily on personal experience and gut-instincts, it increasingly requires a combination of both personal experience and professionalization and structure. On one hand, individuals cannot train themselves into having an LTO or insider community perspective. However, once they have that necessary component, in light of the need to professionalize and standardize the work, interventionists participate in fairly extensive training and learn to adhere to clearly defined protocols and procedures in their daily work responsibilities. This structure helps further legitimize the field as well as keep outreach workers safer in a taxing and potentially dangerous profession.

## **Chapter 5. Street Outreach: Obstacles and Challenges**

Since street outreach and intervention workers have such a unique role in their communities and work in potentially violent situations, there are a host of challenges or obstacles they must address on a regular basis in this line of work. These obstacles include personal safety issues, deep-rooted gang mentality, lack of opportunities and alternatives, problematic community-law enforcement relations, sustainability of the work, absence of true collaboration, lack of resources, organizational dysfunction, and larger, structural deficits.

### **Dangerousness of the Work**

The first major obstacle street outreach workers must face is the high level of risk involved on a daily basis in this line of work. Interventionists must be willing to put their own safety at risk to help others and work in potentially violent situations. One intervention worker shares his perspective on how dangerous and risky his livelihood is since he has chosen to work in his community and essentially put his own life on the line everyday:

But, it's only for the comfortability of the individual because your life is really on the line. So, whichever way makes sense for the individual that's doing intervention... out here in the community... it's real delicate and you have to do it with open mind and a big heart. (Darien, personal communication, March 6, 2014).

He further explains that often due to previous criminal activity, arrest records, and incarceration histories, street outreach workers have somewhat limited employment opportunities. They recognize the importance of intervening in the lives of youth in their communities as a way to give back to the neighborhoods they harmed with their past actions. They are willing to work in this capacity in spite of the fact that outreach and intervention is no ordinary job and it is inherently dangerous. He states:

We need help because a lot of us can't go out there and get those jobs because we have messed... our background up so much, but when we caught on to what we were doin' was wrong, it was too late... And, we can't go back and erase it. All we can do is just give back and go against the grain, and go against what we were taught, just to show somebody else, 'Hey, don't be like I was.' ... it's almost too late for us. So, we have to do somethin' dangerous like puttin' our lives on the line... just to... change our communities and make a livin' at that same time. (Darien, personal communication, March 6, 2014).

He maintains that even though he cannot right the wrongs of his past, he can work in a potentially dangerous environment to help others avoid making harmful decisions and improve his community moving forward.

In addition to working in high risk, dangerous environments, street outreach workers face situations that are quite traumatizing on a regular basis. One interventionist notes that anyone who works in this field must be prepared to deal with traumatic, emotionally draining scenarios at any time given the nature of violence in these neighborhoods. He states that workers need to be aware that they will often be first responders to shootings or killings:

A lot of these people; they be wantin' to do the work and... it ain't no TV, it ain't no movie... I don't know what you think you gettin' yourself into 'cause there really ain't no money behind it too. Once you get involved, you want to be the first one to run out there on a crime scene and see somebody guts hangin' out, brains hangin' out, it's somethin' totally different. (A'Don, personal communication, July 15, 2014).

A law enforcement official echoes this sentiment as he describes how many residents of these target communities, even young children, are often quite desensitized to violent or traumatic events in this environment. He states:

We have people that have no regard for life and how I became more sensitized to that fact is working here with our young people... I heard... one young man say to another... he was about eight years old, 'Hey, did you see that guy's noodle on the ground over there when we were goin' to school this morning?' And, he was talkin' about someone's brains that were blown out and they were laid out; the kids were on their way to school, and they were like laughing about, 'Look at his noodle on the ground.' And... I was hurt to hear that... kids at that age, 'cause I'd have never saw nothin' like that at my age... And so, we live in this particular community... where there's a lot of violence, a lot of death, and young people are being desensitized to life, the quality of life, the types of life they can live because all they see is this – violence. (Calvin, personal communication, November 6, 2013).

He shares his distress about the fact that young children live in such communities where traumatic events are taken for granted as being normal or commonplace in the neighborhood. Street outreach workers often grow up in these same communities and experience a similar type of desensitization as youth, but they have distanced themselves from violent activities enough to recognize that youth do have other options and there is the possibility for a better quality of life with the appropriate level of intervention. Street outreach workers can teach youth that there can and should be more to life than violence and criminal activity regardless of what one's past might have been. One interventionist explains:

I've been shot up several times and stuff and I'm still right here. I'm still goin' to my turf, been to prison for over ten years... I've been treated, all fucked up by the police - I've still got respect for them and I still love life. I love my father, my mother, my grandmother, my grandfather, you know? I've been put to the test... don't stop me from lovin' and givin'. (A'Don, personal communication, July 15, 2014).

### **Gang Mentality and Hopelessness**

Another major obstacle that is closely related to the first is the prevalent gang mentality and sense of hopelessness among many residents in these communities. Street outreach workers recognize that there is a certain permanency to gangs and gang activity in these neighborhoods and they often speak of developing ways to work with gang members rather than eliminating gangs altogether. According to one intervention worker:

A lot of people think they gonna try and get rid of gangs - gangs ain't goin' nowhere. It's tribal, it's gonna exist, it's how do we deal with gangs and how we change the mentality of gangs, and how the gangs operate. (Anthony, personal communication, January 24, 2014).

The idea is to work with youth and with gang members to help prevent them from becoming “trapped” in a lifestyle that leads to incarceration or even death. This interventionist further explains how he was able to escape this trap:

My other best friend that was out there on the streets, he was like, more or less ... a real, true friend because the statement he made to me on the phone was, ‘I'm glad you locked up. I'm really glad you're locked up 'cause I know what you'd be doin' out here.’ And, that's a true statement because I was already like so far into gangs where I couldn't see

myself gettin' out of it... just like diggin' a ditch and you're goin' so far you can't even see the light, how to get out. (Anthony, personal communication, January 24, 2014).

In spite of his being "far into gangs," he was able to escape this lifestyle and he now works with neighborhood residents to help prevent them from becoming trapped in this life or to help them choose a different path if they have already becoming gang involved. He describes his own personal journey of learning to forgive himself, asking God to forgive him, and embracing intervention work as his mission in life:

I think that's the thing, too, with gangs, you know, people have a hard time to forgive... I just look to God and ask... forgiveness and... once I know He accepted me, so I just move on. ... That's why I can do what I do now, is that... I have that faith... and God is with me... on this mission I'm doin'. So... that's my whole thing and that what's changed my whole mentality, my whole way of life. (Anthony, personal communication, January 24, 2014).

One outreach worker notes that even though the gang mentality may change due to the nature of gang activity and violence, youth are never really prepared to commit to this lifestyle:

That's the part where the little youngsters don't really know what they're gettin' themselves into, they're committin' to... especially when it's a little, young female... now a day, little young girls, they just hang around just to be a part of somethin', they usin' the gangs to fight their problems and stuff. That's why I said most these little crimes that we have out here now is all domestic - come from parties... and relationships and stuff now. That part with the whole...gang mentality, you know, kind of changed with this new generation. (A'Don, personal communication, July 15, 2014).

Over the course of my interviews, I learned that the nature of violence has shifted a bit in these communities. Whereas outreach workers used to spend most of their time addressing hardcore gang violence, they characterize much of the current violence as “domestic,” or violence that is motivated by more interpersonal issues due to girls, fights, or parties. In spite of the fact that much of the violence outreach workers deal with in their communities is currently “domestic” in nature, they still must help youth combat this pervasive gang lifestyle mentality. Once intervention workers have made personal changes and have learned to forgive themselves, they can work with youth to break the cycle of the gang mentality and hopelessness in these communities. Street outreach workers often target youth to help them make positive choices even in the midst of quite often bleak circumstances. These workers understand that many youth lack any kind of positive outlook or life skills and identify this as one key area of intervention work.

An outreach worker informs:

They go into environments that is hopeless. And... that gives them no hope, and that's where we come in. We give them that motivation. We give them that hope because it's never too late to obtain a full, meaningful life. You can start today. And, we tell them to internalize it; where they say that... I can have a full, meaningful life. Every time we talk to them... we make them internalize it to where they're speakin' in the first person, I.

And, givin' them self-determination... and not self-doubt. (Darien, personal communication, March 6, 2014).

He stresses the importance of teaching youth self-determination because it motivates them even in their “hopeless” environments. In this way, youth can learn to have an awareness of the environment as well as self when making decisions, and not simply take for granted that they are destined to behave in certain ways simply because of where they live or how they grow up. This

is particularly important considering the severity of potential consequences youth face as a result of their behavior as they transition from childhood to adulthood. He further explains:

When you become an adult, you have to break those... childhood conditionings and start thinkin' and acting as... an adult because if you do something wrong, your parents are not gonna slap you on the wrist or on the hand, they're gonna put these handcuffs on your wrists and your hands and... send you away. (Darien, personal communication, March 6, 2014).

He advises that the best way to prevent youth from becoming trapped in the gang mindset and mentality is to teach these young people how to set and attain goals for themselves. Street outreach workers are equipped to model this behavior and teach from personal experience with gang life. This worker explains how he uses his own past to relate to youth in his prevention and intervention work. He states:

So, to prevent those things from happenin', we have to teach them and show them... not to do certain things and start focusin' on success. Start focusin', making small... short-term goals... once you reach that short-term goal, you'll... make another goal, a medium-term, then a long-term, and to gradually position yourself to be successful in life...and I just wish that there was some type of... curriculum... or class or something that teaches this in schools, and they didn't have it when I was goin' to school, and they don't have it now. So, it takes people like ourselves that... went into the real world and slipped and tripped and bumped our head, and now... Okay, we have to go and give these kids... these life skills so they won't do the same thing we did.... When I left this school, I didn't have these tools. So, it's like, 'Hey, I'm tryin' to give y'all a heads up. I come from the same community that you guys come from.... I owe this to you.' ... The

principal that's there now, he was a counselor when I was going to the school, so he remembered me. And... he just opened the door for us and, and... he just... a great guy that ... really believes in...the work that I'm doin'. He... remembered me when I was going there, involved in a couple of riots at the school, involved in some... not so great things in the school. And then for him to see me today like, 'Man, you really changed. So, I know you have something good to bring back.' And... he is allowing me to do that... with our intervention team, which is a great thing. (Darien, personal communication, March 6, 2014).

This intervention worker has been able to demonstrate personal change to staff at the school he attended when he was young and because of this has gained access into the school to work with the youth. He recognizes that he had a bit of a bad reputation when he was young because of the ways in which he acted out in school, but, because of this, he is able to relate to the youth in his community and is able to teach them some life skills he lacked as a young man. He and his intervention team now work with youth in this school to help them make healthier choices and avoid getting stuck in negative behavior patterns.

Another street outreach worker shares his experience of transitioning from gang life to a position of working in prevention and intervention. He had to learn to forgive himself and he also recognizes the role his support system and faith played in helping him make these changes in his life. He describes the following:

You know, the work that we doin'... we have gained a lot of success in this work... so my change, basically... was self, you know? ... And, I had some mentors... that helped me and mentored me... and keep me... focused, and my pastor... so, you know, my faith and that's the number one. So, I had a lot of people that supported me, and...that's

another thing that, I think, an individual need is that support system... they can fall on, go to when they need advice... took me a while to learn a lot of that, and like I said, it took me five years... to forgive those that killed my buddy and our friend... so I could move on. (Anthony, personal communication, January 24, 2015).

He notes that it took him five years to be able to deal with the murder of his friend and move forward. He uses this personal experience to work with youth in the community and help them not become stuck in gang life or accept the inevitability of hopelessness in what are often the dismal circumstances of these communities. Intervention workers first must train themselves to move past their own personal experiences and transcend this mentality. Moving forward, they can then use this experience to help others overcome it as well.

### **Boundaries with Law Enforcement**

A major obstacle for street outreach workers is the matter of identifying appropriate boundaries with law enforcement and negotiating interactions in the field. Certainly, these two entities have different missions for their efforts in their target communities, yet they must find a way to coexist. Interventionists acknowledge that a tension exists, and much of this has to do with the fact that most street outreach workers have violent, gang-involved histories. One interventionist states, "Law enforcement doesn't trust us or believe we're different now." (Darien, personal communication, March 6, 2014).

Law enforcement officials do not have positive, well-established relationships in their target communities. Intervention workers point out that officers who spend most of their time patrolling the neighborhoods in their cars are more focused on surveillance than on building relationships with community residents. This perpetuates the typically long-standing distrust between law enforcement officials and their target communities. An interventionist informs:

People like, 'Where they at?' That why people don't like 'em. They don't trust 'em. Because why? 'Cause of the things you not doin... Somebody get shot, they don't really show too much care....They just like, 'Well, it not our problem.' And, they may think like, 'I gotta make sure I get home to my family at the end of the day.' So, you don't think people feel the same way here? That they got to get back to their family at the end of the day? And, with that, how can you police this community...thinkin' like that? Not bein' proactive. You drive by, you don't know nobody. You don't know who the stakeholders are, you don't know nothin'. You just... drive around here...be more proactive, gettin' out and talkin' with these gang members, stop treatin' 'em all as thugs and criminals. Just get out and talk to 'em. 'Hey,' you know? Don't run 'em off, talk to 'em. (Marcus, personal communication, January 28, 2014).

Intervention workers often act as mediators between law enforcement and the community; they know how to deal with both groups on some level. In some situations, outreach workers can address problematic behavior in their target communities prior to law enforcement becoming involved. One interventionist describes his experience of essentially patrolling the public parks to help manage illegal parent behavior; this not only helps parents avoid arrest, it is also an avenue for teaching parents about setting a good example for their children.

Nine times out of ten, the officers are makin' stops that they really didn't have to. They could just keep on rollin' ... they could just check all they hotspots instead, you know, wastin' their time just pullin' over everybody they feel is a threat...when we first started this, we was always at the parks - that's all we had was parks...officers had to keep comin' up there and like checkin' the parents for drinkin' and smokin' weed... So, it was up to the intervention to get everything in order...so we had to tell these parents they

can't be drinkin' while we up there with the kids...Not only that, you drinkin' in front of your kids, you ain't settin' a good example...and weed smoke, that whole park smelled like weed. It was an issue where we could understand why the police kept comin' up here fuckin' with y'all. So, this is where the intervention worker...talk to these parents...try to get...they conduct around the schools and the parks...the marijuana smoke and everything. And, it caused problems with the officers and intervention workers – 'Well, you need to tell your parents they shouldn't be smokin' in the park. I'm gonna be comin' up here...'... then when they see a sergeant come through... they know sergeant ain't playin' and shit, and we ain't even pretty much got say nothing. (A'Don, personal communication, July 15, 2014).

Street outreach workers note that many officers are not trained to deal with the spectrum of issues and needs they encounter with the residents in their communities. Interestingly, these interventionists agree that there are problems on both sides; many community members do not engage respectfully with law enforcement, but, on the other hand, many officers are not equipped to address some of the mental health and other special needs they encounter.

To be honest, I don't think none of 'em... know how to talk at all ... but that's from bein' in the streets, you know, doin' intervention and gangbangin' ... I can see how they can be real combative 'cause they run into a lot of ignorance - I ain't gonna lie. It's a lot of ignorance out there with the alcohol and the drugs, you got a lot of mental illness people out there that's just bein' in the streets just talkin' crazy. So, their work is cut out but... that's where the expertise and training come into play and stuff... my mother was mentally ill and she didn't weigh no more than 100 pounds, and we used to have to call the police to restrain her... 'cause if she get to pickin' up stuff, but we had these officers

comin' in the house with their guns pulled out and everything and, you know, I just couldn't see that happenin' like, 'You, like you 250-pound officer and this is the first thing you resort to is your gun?' ...I'm like, 'Hold on. Let me go in there and get her,' and then I go in there and I get on top of her and stuff. Just get the handcuffs, restrain her... the officers was tellin' me, 'We don't got no trainin' in this area and stuff. I get calls all the time dealin' with mental cases... and most of my officers just don't have no trainin' in that area... dealin' with mental patients and stuff.' (A'Don, July 15, 2014).

Intervention workers, in this view, can and should train law enforcement how to deal more effectively with their target communities. They are uniquely equipped for this task for a couple of reasons. First, because they grew up in these communities, outreach workers have clear insight into many of the ways neighborhood residents feel and will act in different scenarios. Secondly, they are quite familiar with the workings of the police, since many of them have had personal experience moving through the different layers of the criminal justice system.

Interventionists are well suited to assist law enforcement to utilize effective communication strategies with community members:

So, when we're talking to... police about possibly doin' some police training to get them in a better state of mind to deal with the community, we come in there as equals. They don't tell us, 'Okay, this is how it's gonna be.' 'No, this is not how it's gonna be. This is what we can do. This is what we cannot do, this is what we will not do. We are not police informers. We can do crowd control over here, etc. (Rasheed, personal communication, October 14, 2014).

Due to the variety of issues in the target communities, intervention workers recognize the advantages of linking up with the public safety officials in their neighborhoods and forming a

network so they can provide continuity across services. These entities typically respond to different types of crises:

When it relates to hostility, aggression, and violence, you have to link up with the public safety system...because...where you got your fire department, paramedics...department of social service, mental health - these people are on the ground...tryin' to create that state of normality I was talkin' about earlier... there's certain things public safety professionals do. Back to those common denominators... incident command system...protocol, manual of operations, skill sets...The key is... if we just leave it at reducin' violence for now, reduce the violence in a given community... you have to get these people who are vested in saving lives, restoring lives, restoring individuals... speakin' the same language. So, therefore, you've got to get these public safety entities and then you've got to pick out all the commonalities, and then you've got to do some type of comprehensive training to where they're understanding each other, and that way, they create a level of respect for each other. (Rasheed, personal communication, October 14, 2014).

However, this network across public safety services must be built on a platform of equality. This means that there cannot be a significant power differential or one entity dictating the behavior of all involved. Rather, all key players must be trained in and subject to the same protocols for how to act in a given scenario. There must be a shared understanding for what the expectations are for each given entity. This is particularly important for crisis response situations to ensure the safety of all involved and the efficient provision of services. For intervention workers, this is a unique challenge because of the historically adversarial nature of the relationship between these community residents and law enforcement.

Being able to function with different venues, going in, from the perspective of equality. We have...what I would call a... workin' relationship with some officers...usually those officers are officers that have been community proven... an asset to the community over time...if I have workin' relationships with certain commanders, etc., they would call my organization or put a note out there before they ran through like buffaloes to do some type of herding in the community...you damn straight I have some dialogue with 'em if it's gonna stop...some people gettin' their head busted in my community...because we come to the table as equals in this... we don't work with law enforcement...we don't pass information to 'em...on a crime scene or a situation, what we will do is step in there and do rumor control, we'll do crowd control...Because, remember, at the end of the day, the goal is to bring that community back to some degree of normality. We're tryin' to diffuse the situation...we'll work with anybody in the process as long as it's predicated on a level of respect, and they respect what...we do. Certain things we don't do. You don't talk to us out in the middle of the community, you know, make it seem like we got this ongoin' relationship...if I see a law enforcement officer that...we have a respective work relationship with, there might be a simple nod or somethin' of that nature.... you got a lot of youngsters comin' up...and their perception would be somethin' totally different... it's a careful...relationship... I emphatically state that we don't work for law enforcement, we're not information passers, we don't snitch, we don't do anything of that nature. We have a respective workin' relationship. The brass in law enforcement...has seemed to embrace intervention..." (Rasheed, personal communication, October 14, 2014).

From this perspective, it would behoove law enforcement to make an increased effort to build relationships and establish rapport in the target neighborhoods, as this could increase overall safety. Also, as evidenced in this quote, there is a certain amount of collaboration that is currently happening, and, ideally, will continue, because it helps break down the long-standing alienation between law enforcement and these besieged communities. It must be clear to all involved that street outreach workers are not a part of law enforcement in any way. This is crucial if interventionists are to maintain credibility in the community. This outreach worker highlights the need for interventionists to maintain appropriate social distance from law enforcement so as not to appear to be informants or snitches on any level. He notes that there are law enforcement personnel for whom he has mutual respect, but the ways in which they interact are delicate and quite specific, especially in public.

These intervention workers are specifically trained to work with this city's public safety system, adhering to the same protocols, and interventionists have also in turn trained public safety officials in how to respond to violent incidents.

Because we work with the public safety system...all my guys and girls are low-level, professional, certified...public safety first responders...we work with anybody in the public safety system to a limited degree to...save lives. So, we'll cross paths with police officers...with fire department, domestic violence task force, victims' services...those roles, in some cases, are limited and some cases are much broader. We got an outstanding relationship with the fire department, and we trained LA in violence intervention protocol. (Rasheed, personal communication, October 14, 2014).

Unfortunately, there are instances in which establishing functioning working relationships between street outreach workers and law enforcement personnel does not seem to be possible.

Certainly, this city's history makes this a particularly challenging feat. Some law enforcement officials and some outreach workers may never buy into this work, because there is a complicated history of relationships between the residents and law enforcement in these communities.

So, you're gonna have some officers that never buy into this work, you're gonna have interventionists that never buy into this work...each of those situations have to be dealt with individually...you got to look at an individual...officer and decide I can work with that dude, I can't work with that dude... it's very delicate, and this is not somethin' that's gonna be dealt with...in the next five to ten years. You know, there's history here...serious history, and...most of it ain't good. While things are gettin' better...there's some history. (Rasheed, personal communication, October 14, 2014).

As he advises, occasionally it is necessary for interventionists to avoid both law enforcement and other outreach workers on an individual basis; he recognizes that he cannot work effectively with certain individuals and this may or may not change over time. The volatile history of these relationships in these communities does not lend itself to a quick or easy fix. In fact, he further explains that this larger issue can discourage some law enforcement personnel who are community-minded and working toward positive changes in these neighborhoods:

Let's say we get an outstanding officer that's ...really tryin' to do some great things for the community... If the community doesn't support that officer, two things - you want the brass to know this is the type of officer we would like in the community, but more importantly, if he's not supported or she's not supported, the officer's getting flack from the other officers because he or she is that way, now they're gettin' flack from the community. So, that officer's really kind of left out there on his own, and that officer

from the perspective of self-survival ain't gonna take bein' the target on both sides too long. So, he goes or she goes back and says, 'F-this. I'm just gonna do my damn job. I'm gonna arrest and suppress, and that's gonna be it.' So, you know, that's a fine line in there. If you truly want to change, you gotta be an initiator in what that change looks like. (Rasheed, personal communication, October 14, 2014).

### **Sustaining the Work Over Time**

Sustaining the field of street outreach and intervention over time is a problematic issue. It is possible that this work is a bit confined to the current generation of interventionists who are committed to this field. If this is the case, outreach workers must develop a way to pass along their vision and shared mission as well as training and expertise to a younger generation of potential workers. It is no simple task for outreach workers to develop strategies for how to sustain the work over time for several reasons. First, the nature of much of this work involves crisis response and the ability to bring the community back to some state of normalcy post violent events. Additionally, because a violent incident can occur at any time, it is particularly difficult for interventionists to spend significant energy focusing on larger structural change that might in turn help prevent some future violent incidents. Further, there are many street outreach workers who dedicate decades of service to the intervention field, but this is not the case for all. Therefore, there is an ongoing need to continue to identify new workers in this line of work.

According to street outreach workers, their work has shifted a bit over time both because of the aging of gang members as well as changes in the nature of the violence on the streets. Some gang members tend to pull back in their levels of involvement as they age which in turn leaves room for a new crop of gang members, or "youngsters" as this outreach worker states:

Some of the communities got little youngsters representin' 'em and that's where it's all falling apart at. (A'Don, personal communication, July 15, 2014).

He further elaborates on how he currently focuses less on hardcore gang intervention and spends more time addressing a more recently prevalent type of violence:

The summer started off with the gang violence with the Rumsey Boys and the Triad 47s, the war goin' on...It's the same neighborhoods goin' back and forth...after so many years of feudin' and stuff like, some of the older guys, they play the backfield like, 'I ain't involved with it no more.' They done let the youngsters take over the neighborhood and ... got a mind set of their own. So, that's what brought these needs...to the table, some of the older guys come to the table to try to make sense of everything that's goin' on in the streets, 'cause it really ain't too much gangbangin' goin' on. It's a lot of domestic violence goin' on. A lot of domestic violence. (A'Don, personal communication, July 15, 2014).

Interventionists inform that with the changing nature of violence, there has been a fracturing of the hardcore gang violence of the older generation, which has allowed for a more "domestic" type of violence to emerge with the youngsters. The new generation of youth is causing trouble, and outreach workers spend a considerable amount of time working with youth violence related to parties, relationships, or fights over females. They must investigate these situations to determine the root of the problem so they can address it promptly and appropriately, and they also must identify potential future interventionists who can continue working in this field when the current workers reach the point of retirement.

Another interventionist recognizes the unique challenge of working with this younger generation in the hopes of encouraging these youth to become involved in the field and continue the work into the future.

We're trying to build more and more youth to think like us, to want to give back to their community after they have become successful from all the positive reinforcement that we're instilling in them, to always come back to your community and help the process.

To keep the positive going... It's gonna keep continuing on even after I'm dead and gone.

(Darien, personal communication, March 6, 2014).

He acknowledges the role he and his generation of gang members played in the creation of many of the community's issues and problems, and he shares his vision for how this line of work might continue in future generations:

We started these gangs - now it's time for... Los Angeles to stand up and make the rest of this country do the same, 'cause we believe when men stand up, boys will follow. And when the boys start followin' the men, and the men start takin' back our communities and bein' the men that we know we are, and that we can be, all of the childish things that these youth are being involved in, it will cease. But, like I said, it's... decades... of work to be done... I'm just so proud of bein' a part of it, you know? (Darien, personal communication, March 6, 2014).

Outreach workers use specific methods to encourage youth to become involved with intervention work. One interventionist explains that he has been attending a new type of meetings with strategically selected stakeholders from various facets of the community. He and his fellow interventionists each bring two "youngsters" from their respective neighborhoods so the outreach workers can model how they conduct business. He describes this process as one

way he and his colleagues can begin to pass the torch to future prospective street outreach workers:

We been havin' our own little meetin's aside from all the... churches and the publicity and everything... the gang members. Stakeholders...we try to make sense of everything, and ...they recommended each individual out of every neighborhood bring in two youngsters...so we passin' it on. Like this is how we take care of business. We do sit down and take care of business. So, the youngsters are sittin' by observing how the older guys take care of business. ... this is somethin' new outside of everything that's been goin' on with the general crowd, with the officers and the churches and stuff. (A'Don, personal communication, July 15, 2014).

The “youngsters” who are invited to these meetings are typically adolescents, but they could also be young adults, and street outreach workers use the meetings as one way to build mentoring relationships with these young people. Specifically, interventionists are hoping to pass on general information and knowledge as well as alternative ways of thinking. Outreach workers hope to have a positive influence on these youth and to model prosocial behavior.

One of the guys decided to bring two youngsters to these meetings let 'em, just the whole trainin' part...they could be... young as...14... Old as... like 27 - young adults. But they pretty much, when they under 30 and over ... 15... they pretty much in their... own little grown up world, thinkin' they know what they doin', tryin' to survive, and... any kind of adult figure, anybody that they look up to is gonna be an influence in their life.

...Whatever you doin', it gone be an influence on life. Like if I'm doin' intervention and I got my boy over here sellin' drugs with all these cars and stuff, they're gonna be lookin' up to him 'cause he got all the nice things, and the girls likin' him and stuff. Like, but as

soon as you let ‘em know that only gonna last so long, you know, it’s that material world... then he got to be lookin’ over his back all the time... When you pass your experience on, you give ‘em a general knowledge, ‘cause I could say with me growin’ up, I didn’t have that... ‘cause my older brother, they was already locked up. Everybody I looked up to was probably gone from me - my father wasn’t around, my brothers were locked up, the ones I did look up to. So now I’m lookin’ at my big homey in the neighborhood, the one that like... they are doin’ somethin’, the ones that was catchin’ my attention and stuff. And it was all a negative influence but at the same time, they all gave me love in return, that’s that whole problem of how the gang become the family... If you ain’t got nowhere to turn, they always turn to the gangs... And a lot of the problem, everybody think the gang is negative and stuff. Well, you know, it’s a lot of negative too, at the same time it’s a lot of love, a lot of family. (A’Don, personal communication, July 15, 2014).

Many young people imitate the behavior of significant adults in their lives; street outreach workers hope to be positive examples for these youth and offer healthy alternatives to the negative behavior the youth witness in their neighborhoods.

### **Limits to Collaboration**

In spite of the good intentions of many stakeholders, lack of true collaboration across agencies continues to be a challenge in the street outreach and intervention field. This is perhaps due in part to the fact that each of the relevant entities approaches this line of work from significantly different perspectives, including intervention, law enforcement, educators, clergy, and other community advocates. A community advocate who serves in an advisory capacity to the case study organization explains some of the complexities of collaboration in such a field:

So here's where the collaboration gets sticky because there are all kinds of obstacles in the path and you have people... coming from their own particular life view and life experience... and their own personal agendas *and* the agendas of the organizations that they are from in their fulltime job, so to get a group like that to agree... first of all, they *don't* agree, so... it creates dysfunction because they... can't move forward and make decisions because you never get... full buy-in by everybody. Even on what's our mission statement. And everybody has a little other different part they want to tweak on it, so that's a challenge... Self-interest. You can't really program that out of the equation as far as I can see. So, the only way that I can operate within that framework is to say that personally, I'm always going to push for what's in the *higher* good – what serves the highest good? And so I'm always sort of pushing the level of abstraction as high as it can go in order to try to get enough people to agree. And not just serve a law enforcement interest or just serve... a gang intervention interest or just serve a social worker interest or just serve a school teacher interest. (Miriam, personal communication, February 4, 2014).

This individual is articulating what makes collaboration in street outreach and intervention a complex challenge, just as it is across many areas of the provision of social services. The existence of competing agendas, different frameworks, and a wide range of egos can interfere with agreement on a shared mission statement, goals, objectives, and implementation strategies.

Another perspective on how collaboration happens in this field is that of law enforcement personnel. Law enforcement often talks about collaboration existing under a safety net; the focus is bringing together multiple entities and providing information and linking people up with resources. According to one law enforcement official:

The collaboration is made up of law enforcement, for this area...the collaboration is a safety collaborative first. That's the primary...purpose of the collaborative.... It's a resource to all of these entities so that they can get first hand information under a safety umbrella. (Calvin, personal communication, November 6, 2013).

In addition to emphasizing the importance of safety, law enforcement personnel also describe collaboration as a process of interaction with other law enforcement agencies and some cooperation with reformed gang members (working in a gang prevention and intervention capacity), where collaboration often increases functional communication between relevant parties. For another law enforcement official, true collaboration means that he and his colleagues build relationships with community residents for the purpose of increasing the transparency of policing procedures as well as facilitating communication and mediation in problematic situations. He advises this allows the police to do their jobs more efficiently, improves law enforcement-community relations, and reduces the number of victims of these violent incidents. He explains the way he views collaboration in these areas:

What it really means to me is developing the relationships where many times they have a good understanding of what we do and how we do it...and it gives me a good understanding of what they're seeing...if we have a problem with a gang, we can go in there and...arrest people, start...writing tickets...However... I think, it's a lot easier on all of us, our relationships with... the community, and...the people from the outside that are lookin' at what we're doing... to reach out to the community first... a perfect example would be how recently...over the last year, we've had a couple homicides and immediately not only were we able to gain information from the community about... who might be involved and where this was coming from, but they allowed us time to go out

there and make arrests, and put people in jail, and solve these homicides without those retaliations. So...in situations that in the past were proven to have many victims by the time everything was all said and done, we've had situations where we haven't had any retaliations. They've allowed us to do our job. (David, personal communication, March 27, 2014).

Street outreach workers share a different perspective on what collaboration is and how it works on the ground. For some, this means reaching out to others with specific expertise. For example, interventionists can work with education personnel to meet youths' needs more effectively as a multidisciplinary team in certain situations than as lone outreach workers. One intervention worker likens this to schools teaching multiple teachers to teach a variety of subjects based on different levels of expertise and training:

Collaborate, to me, means where we can trade ideas with each other. We can help each other. I have my vision of where my organization might be headed. And another individual might have their vision of how their organization might be headed, but we can collaborate together to... come in one unique area and help with both of our resources... I don't have to answer to everything, and they don't have to answer to everything. But, by us coming together, we can help more people... our common goal is for our youth. So...our youth can go through life without the things that we went through, that held us down...collaboration is... a piece of relationship building...relationship could be a lot of different things. Just bein' on the phone talkin' to someone saying, 'Hey, this is what we want to do. We're meeting with each other and...we're finding a common ground'...I'm an interventionist, but I need to collaborate with an educator because I want to reach a certain group of kids, but the educator have a certain type of... expertise that I don't, and

I have a certain type of expertise that, that educator don't have. But, because we came together, we helped a certain group of individuals. And... the kids profit from that... it's the same thing...like being in the school setting, you have a math class, a science class, a history class... all together, this one kid is getting all these different areas of education because of these different teachers. That's just a big collaboration... nobody is...trying to be the big 'I' and the little 'you', and no one is trying to be the face of everything...collaboration means that we're all gonna come down to a certain level and then we're gonna build each other up and we're gonna accomplish a certain goal together. That's what collaboration is to me. (Darien, personal communication, March 6, 2014).

In this sense, collaboration is joining forces to solve a variety of problems or address a multitude of issues requiring different types of knowledge and expertise. He views this process as one that includes a variety of agencies identifying common ground for particular service provision. But other intervention workers perceive the collaboration between street outreach workers to be most central to this work with other agencies falling behind this. Another interventionist informs:

Intervention is the most...collaborative part in this work...then you got...the schools...Then law enforcement is like last.... Schools took a while...to have that relationship. (Anthony, personal communication, January 24, 2014).

His view is that collaborating generally happens between intervention workers; it also happens between outreach workers and school personnel, but this has been a more recent development. Finally, it happens between intervention workers and law enforcement personnel but this is not as prevalent. There are real world limits to collaboration; outreach workers identify specific ways in which it works and others in which it does not. There are limitations to collaboration across

different frameworks – law enforcement and intervention, for example – because each entity has a drastically different mission and perhaps opposing responsibilities. Even when there is a mutually agreed upon desire to collaborate on a broad scale across organizations, this may only happen between specific parties in particular ways.

There seems to be a general consensus in the field that in order for collaboration truly to happen, each respective stakeholder must remain within the confines of certain boundaries and expectations. One intervention worker explains that different entities bring value to the field when they can each fulfill their own individual roles in these efforts:

That whole concept of staying in your own lane, it's goin' a long way, too, 'cause like every individual in the taskforce, they doin' somethin' different, but ... we all come together and...play their part, like the clergy... education, park recreation, the city and the county, and all the different...intervention programs that goes on with it. And...the female organization... at the end of the day, it got to make sense, and it got to work, instead of just fundin' something, you know, without actually seein' if it work. You know, that's why ... I be kind of like pickin' out ... individuals... like Marcus said, 'If you out here doin' the work, we'll see you.' (A'Don, personal communication, July 15, 2014).

He lists clergy members, education personnel, law enforcement, parks and recreation staff, and fellow intervention workers as significant stakeholders who contribute to this field and community improvement as a whole.

Problems arise when there is a lack of communication between the key players in the community and the target population ends up missing out on needed service provision. This

failure to coordinate with other entities serving the same target population can result in duplicate services and other related issues, as one law enforcement official informs:

It's a lot of people doing the same type of work in the community but it overlaps and either they're people gettin' dropped through the cracks, going to the right service but not gettin' all the services, or going to the right agency and they're limited in what they can do or they're overloaded and so there's a gap. (Calvin, personal communication, November 6, 2013).

Intervention workers echo a similar sentiment regarding the duplication of services or inadequate service provision due to lack of collaboration with colleagues in the field. This intervention worker likens this dysfunction to that of gang banging:

Right now, we got a problem with the calendar, you know, we gang bangin' on the calendar amongst each other because everybody got all these events. Like you got a walk over here, you got a walk over here. Like who are you anyway? Why you got a walk anyway? 'Cause you done heard about this walk stuff, so that's the argument.

Everybody's... pretty much piggybackin' off the next person, doin' the same thing... which is fine... as long as it's in different sections of the community. (A'Don, personal communication, July 15, 2014).

He acknowledges that there is plenty of work to be done but that the target population misses out on needed services because the key players in the field often do not coordinate effectively. He elaborates:

How many organizations you gonna have? Everybody gonna have their own organization? Why we all can't come together under one umbrella, you over here and I'm over here? You know...everybody been separate but we all get money from the same pot,

but we all doin' our separate thing. That's what I feel like we at now, instead everybody doin' intervention, like it's the new hustle now. (A'Don, personal communication, July 15, 2014).

He is concerned that some of the people in the field either have lost sight of or do not agree with what the main priorities ought to be in this line of work. If intervention workers are more focused on the "hustle," (earning money) than they are on working together to combat gang violence and other community issues, the target population ultimately will suffer.

### **Lack of Resources**

As is the case in many kinds of social service work, a shortage of funding is an ongoing obstacle in the intervention field. Street outreach workers fulfill a unique role in their communities, one for which they are specifically qualified, but they rarely, if ever, have independent sources of income or their own outside funding sources. Intervention workers feel this constraint keenly, and believe that they must receive the financial backing to do the work in their communities that they are uniquely suited to do. Essentially, individuals, organizations, and other entities must buy into this concept and provide the necessary funding streams to the individuals on the front lines. As one outreach worker articulates:

It have to take a lot of positive people to back the people that's really doin' the work.

Where I find where we fail at a lot of times is because we don't have the backing. We

don't have the backing to continue this work. It's working... The work we're doing is

working. But, a lot of people come in just to get a tax write off and then they fall off and

they never see the end results. And then it leaves the community stagnated... Just know

that... we're trying to continue with the work and we just need backing. We just need

people to really believe in us and know this is what we're gonna be doin'... This work is

worth it, it's worth savin' lives... And, it's worth investin' in your youth. You can change a whole community around, a whole community if we stick with it and trust in the people that's doin' the work. That's... just basically it. It sums it all up" (Darien, personal communication, March 6, 2014).

He notes that a certain kind of permanency or consistency in funding is needed and that, to some extent, this requires those who provide the financial backing to "trust" in the fact that intervention work is saving lives in the community.

A community advocate recognizes the failure to pay intervention workers a living wage as problematic both because the work is exceptionally dangerous and because many interventionists are not only supporting themselves financially, but also have family members as dependents. She informs:

I believe we need to pay intervention more, because they have families of their own and this needs to actually be a living wage if they're going to be out there putting their lives on the line. (Miriam, personal communication, February 4, 2014).

Street outreach workers agree with this assessment. One interventionist explains how his paycheck is spread thin over a variety of expenses including his family's needs, the sports programming he offers youth from his community, transportation and other incidentals related to his outreach responsibilities. Along with many intervention workers, he is struggling with how to manage his income in such a way as to provide for both personal and professional needs. He states:

I'm gonna need this for my sports ...more money that cover for my football and baseball and my driving expenses... some of these areas that had to be funded with education, the tutor, and the sports programs. Then you got... the gas allowance... you had so many

people goin' here and there, to all these different meetin's and trainin' and stuff like that...But, doin' that as an individual, 'cause once we lost our organization, some people... was still receivin' a paycheck for doin' what they was doin'...what can I do with my paycheck with the work I do now, that's where my problem's at now. That I got to take care of my family and house, at the same time, I got to be effective at the work I do too, and I don't have that budget no more that I used to get money from... So, I'm limited to just my paycheck, tryin' to do the work I do, too, at the same time... it's stress free bein' my own boss... at the same time, I don't have all the resources that I used to have to be effective like I used to be when I worked for an organization. (A'Don, personal communication, July 15, 2014).

Since he and his prior agency have undergone some business restructuring, which again is common in this field, funds are channeled a bit differently. He recognizes the advantages to working as one's own boss in many capacities, but also acknowledges that there is a certain other set of difficulties that comes along with this benefit. He is currently weighing the upside of reduced stress levels with the downside of having fewer resources for his responsibilities.

Intervention workers often do not realize how stressful this lack of adequate funding might be when they begin the work. One intervention worker who has been working in the field for years indicates that he has experienced fluctuations in stress and struggles throughout his time spent as a street outreach worker. He describes the emotional toll the work has had on him, especially when he was struggling the most to fulfill his personal financial obligations while simultaneously having something to "give back" to his community:

It's been a learnin' experience for me too...doin' this work ... I'm just tryin' to fit in where I can, where I'm not stressed out... pray for me...I was at that point one time, and

it wasn't 'cause I wasn't makin' enough money, it's just I didn't feel like I had enough to give back, and that's the sad part...I'm in a position where I can give... I feel comfortable I could get up and do this without no problem and stuff. 'Cause like most of the guys I work with... they got ... their jobs ...and they use PACE for the part-time job to do the work in the community. ...some of the guys make this their main job and then there's no insurance, no medical, none of that stuff, no vacation time, none of that. You know...you tryin' to take care of family out there...that's a different story. (A'Don, personal communication, July 15, 2014).

Currently, in this line of work, these street outreach workers typically do not receive benefits packages if they are employed as full-time interventionists. For this reason, many of them work multiple jobs to support themselves and their families. This outreach worker further explains that his boss has a vision for the street outreach and intervention field to grow and for these workers to provide services not only in their own home communities, but also across the country and even internationally, which would stretch the already slim existing resources. This type of expansion would clearly require significant additional funding. He informs:

It was already a challenge just to be in our community and our city, but now to be international... a lot of guys ain't ready for it. Most of these the ones with the families they got to leave at home and stuff...I mean, I wouldn't mind it if he's gonna take care of my family...But, I'm goin' off one income, which is my income... that's why I say PACE pretty much be takin' care of me and my family... that's why I ain't got a problem givin' right back 'cause they been givin' to me... You know, at the end of the day, it's always the money issues, person want to get paid, next, one person want the better car or whatever. But, that's where the individual come in at, some of these guys got their own

little business goin' on, they just need the extra...to do the work that they doin' and stuff.  
(A'Don, personal communication, July 15, 2014).

Intervention workers often have to be proactive about obtaining supplemental sources of income due to the nature of funding streams in this line of work. This is troubling considering that the street outreach work schedule alone can be quite draining, and the need for additional employment results in many interventionists over-committing themselves to a multitude of responsibilities throughout the day. Further, the nature of street outreach work, with sudden problems developing without warning, means workers cannot have other employment that would prevent their immediate response.

### **Organizational Dysfunction**

Closely related to the challenge street outreach workers face due to insufficient funding streams, they also must deal with a significant degree of organizational dysfunction and change. Outreach workers often experience various levels of organizational instability and turnover as a result of both shortages in funding and shifts in the direction of funding streams, and changes in organizational vision. For some workers, this means that they may work for many different organizations throughout their time in the field. One interventionist shares his experience with this issue:

That was my vision of Life Through Unity [his first intervention organization].  
And...that's the language that I wanted to use because I wanted to reach out and help everybody else - on the resources... but then I ended up experiencing... the falls of... infrastructure, organization... and there was a lot of stuff that was goin' on there, too, at the same time... I got to a point to where I couldn't take it no more. I ended up just walkin' away from it...The vision that I set out for it... took on to another role, and... it

wasn't no longer... the vision that I wanted to see the organization go... so other people had other minds and other things... they wanted to do with the organization. So, they pretty much shut me off and... kept me in the office... tellin' me I couldn't... make any changes to the organization.... I was constantly growin' the programs... 'til one day they was like, 'We don't care what you'd had done. We don't care you the founder or not.'

...So, I just walked away from it... and start me a new one. (Anthony, personal communication, January 24, 2014).

Even though he had founded the organization in question, he recognized that his vision for the organization was no longer in line with the others involved. He made the decision to move on and start another organization rather than stay in an environment in which he was dissatisfied. There is certainly some benefit to the ability to restructure existing organizations or found new ones altogether, but this could also impact the community if there is an interruption in services during this process. If organizations are shifting and changing too drastically or too often, it could impede the work that gets done; it is quite difficult for workers to be efficient in this type of upheaval.

Street outreach workers also struggle to continue the work if the structure is viewed as inadequate. Funders often require organizations to demonstrate clear, specific structure in order to continue receiving various funding streams. Historically, this has been problematic in this field. An interventionist with significant expertise in the field and insight into how this line of work has developed and changed over time highlights this issue:

What is tangibly in place? That's what we're lacking, and nobody's gonna respect the community's expertise until it starts putting some of these infrastructures on board to where people can see, 'These people know what the hell they're doin'. They are not

playin', and they are gonna get it done.' Look, a politician wants to be on the side of a winner. You know, if I am a private funder, I want to know people are gonna get solutions at the end of the day. So, that has to be our thinking process. Whatever the hell we've been doin' for the last 40/50/60 years ain't been workin'... It means we need to change the process. (Rasheed, personal communication, October 14, 2014).

He acknowledges that private funders have specific requirements and public figures also prefer to have evidence that the efforts they support are effective. In this sense, stakeholders in the community might have expertise in the field, but unless they can demonstrate it to political figures and funding sources in a way that the message can be received, the structure and process for how things work in this field remain in question. He further indicates, however, that no amount of potential funding or other such backing will cause him to make compromises in how he and his staff conduct business:

I've turned down some monies that truly could have assisted us in the process. But, I'll never, ever, cow down or sell my integrity for a dollar bill because the only thing we've got that gets us through...the process of...real credibility in our community is just that. Our word, our honor, and our integrity. If you lose that. If you lose your credibility with the community, let me tell you sister...it's almost impossible to regain it. (Rasheed, personal communication, October 14, 2014).

Ultimately, he understands that his credibility in his target neighborhoods is priceless and is absolutely necessary for him to continue this work. This means that although lack of funding is an ongoing challenge for him and many of his colleagues in this line of work, he prioritizes his actions in the community over the financial backing for those actions. However, this does create a continuing dilemma. For credible community intervention, there is a constant tension between

the need for money and the need to maintain both individual and organizational integrity and values. Outreach workers need to be aware that certain funding sources might help expand the work that is being done while simultaneously tainting the work in some way.

### **Absence of Opportunity**

Another significant challenge intervention workers face in these target communities is the lack of legitimate opportunities. For youth, this manifests as subpar - or nonexistent – facilities, equipment, and chances to engage in prosocial activities. Outreach workers express their views on how their communities offer disproportionately fewer opportunities to youth in comparison to more affluent areas. One worker notes:

I want to try to get the state of the art stuff there because our community is lacking resources. And, you can go to... any other places - they got the state of the art stuff...facilities...and it just kills me when we don't have nothin' for these kids to do. And, you're always talkin' about... 'Our kids...are off the chain'? (Anthony, personal communication, January 24, 2014).

He is frustrated that many youth act out because they often do not have positive, wholesome opportunities available to them. It is not enough to simply instruct youth to avoid certain behaviors; they must learn how to act appropriately, and they need places to go to learn and spend leisure time. These needs are the same for gang members. Another outreach worker highlights the fact that if he really hopes to attract gang members to a different lifestyle, he needs to be able to offer them something:

Gangsters out here, if you ain't got nothin' for 'em ... they ain't gonna listen to you. You gotta have some kind of influence and stuff over these new generation. I mean, that's pretty much anybody tryin' to have a stakeholder and that's the problem we straddlin' the

fence, too, at the same time, you know, you ain't doin' this but...you still got some kind of connection in the community... what you doin' to keep these youngsters... respectin' you all and your team" (A'Don, personal communication, July 15, 2014).

He notes that not only is he in a constant balancing act of personally avoiding gang and criminal activity while simultaneously maintaining respect and connections in his neighborhood, he also must be able to offer gang members legitimate opportunities if he expects to witness any meaningful change. Straddling the fence is complicated for interventionists; they must stay close enough to gangs to maintain their connections and influence in this sphere, but must keep enough distance to avoid criminal activity and to set a positive example.

A community advocate who has extensive experience working to improve labor and employment conditions echoes a similar sentiment:

Let's just say we wave the magic wand and we got rid of gangbangin', violence. What are they gonna do from there? They gotta do somethin'. They gotta go to work, right? That's what I'm sayin', that, if you stop doin' one thing, you gotta do somethin' else, or else I'm just gonna go back to that because I need gas, food, shelter, today. That's what I'm sayin', that's why I keep sayin'... okay, stop gangbangin' and I'll get you a job over here. Now, if you choose to gangbang after we got you a job... then you're an idiot and you deserve to be in jail... I mean, that's harsh but if you have an avenue to do somethin' good and you decide to do somethin' wrong, then I can't help you on that one. (Earl, personal communication, February 25, 2014).

He believes that eliminating violence and gang activity is not sufficient. It is not enough to simply cease one behavior without having alternative opportunities. In this case, community residents need legitimate opportunities for gainful employment. Otherwise, any cessation from

gang activity is at risk; he highlights that without meaningful opportunities, people will typically slip back into their own patterns.

Given the severity of many of the immediate situations outreach workers must address, their first priority is typically to stabilize the community by responding to fights, shootings, or killings. This first step is necessary, but workers are aware that there are several additional steps required in this process. Once the violence levels in a community have been somewhat stabilized, intervention workers can then begin to shift their focus to helping both gang and non-gang members obtain legitimate employment opportunities. One interventionist explains that during peak instances of violence, gang members will not be able to focus on finding and keeping jobs, because they are too preoccupied with staying alive or engaging in violent acts. He describes how this focus on violence trumps many gang members' concern for legitimate jobs:

I talked to a couple of my guys that working now and doin' things, and... when it was on and crackin' in as far as the violence at it's high, no one can really focus on about gettin' a job. If you're a gang member, you can't focus about gettin' a job 'cause you worried about guys comin' to get you. You're worried about... you have to go over there and retaliate, or you have to be in the hood. And, so you don't have time to really think about, 'Well, my baby hungry over here and I need to get me a job... and be a father... or be a mother to my kid, and raise my kids.' You worried about this guy...you're tryin' to live. (Anthony, personal communication, January 24, 2014).

Recently, intervention workers and other community advocates have begun to address the lack of meaningful employment for community residents. An expert on hiring practices and other labor union issues pertaining to people of color, specifically black community residents, acknowledges

that in his community, he sees racial discrimination at the core of the problem of limited job opportunities. He states:

The focus should be on racial discrimination in terms of employment, because any time you try to build anything, it takes money... So, when you talk about building up our community, makin' this community safe, and building up people's morale, it starts with money. So, if I walk up to a guy that's sellin' weed or crack right now, and tell him, 'Hey, man. You shouldn't be doin' this in my neighborhood.' What's his other alternative? 'Uh, do you have a job for me?' 'Uh, no. But you still shouldn't do this.' 'Oh, so I'm supposed to sit here and starve and not eat because it's morally right?' That's the only other option. (Earl, personal communication, February 25, 2014).

Essentially, he recognizes that the illegal drug market is often more lucrative for many individuals - provided they are not arrested - than other types of employment available in these communities. Though he does not advocate engaging in illegal behavior, he can empathize with the plight of those who live below the poverty level. He further informs:

If you look at all the crime and all of the BS that goes on, the bottom line is because people don't have any money, and that's why they doin' this. I don't think anybody came out of elementary and junior high goin', 'I can't wait to grow up so I can be a crack dealer, or a stripper, or a prostitute.' I don't think that's what they aspire to be, but when you get turned away year after year, month after month, then that's what happens. So... that should be our main focus, to make sure diversity happens... in these work places. (Earl, personal communication, February 25, 2014).

He points out that typically, children most likely do not aspire to deal crack or work in prostitution but that many in these environments eventually become involved in such activities as

a means to earn an income. He further explains that his passion to address the lack of legitimate, gainful employment opportunities in his community is the result of his own personal experience growing up in the neighborhood. He advises that the main reason he did not become deeply entrenched in gang life or end up incarcerated or dead is because he managed to secure lucrative employment at a young age:

It wasn't until I got a good job that I said, 'Hey... I'm workin' now. I'm not gonna be sellin' weed or doin' anything to jeopardize my good payin' job'...and I could have just very well been that statistic, just like all of my other classmates. All my classmates that live in the neighborhood that didn't get a decent job are either dead or in prison, behind drug dealin' and the street life. But, the core of it all was they never got opportunity to get a good job. (Earl, personal communication, February 25, 2014).

He sees this as the most promising way for youth to escape a life filled with gang and other criminal activity, as he indicates:

If I can offer the gangs a job, a clear path, not just some bull, then that will sway them that way. You know, 'What would you rather do, work, take a chance of gettin' killed, or robbed, or prison?' (Earl, personal communication, February 25, 2014).

Further, he acknowledges that this lack of meaningful opportunities appears to be a significant issue for people of color, specifically for black people in inner city areas in this country. He provides his perspective:

It's not a coincidence, every city in America has an inner city full of oppression and despair, and they just happen to be black people. Now, you talk about the ghetto - who's in it? The black people. You can go to Louisville, Missouri, Louisiana, Texas - I don't

care where you go - and you talk about, 'Let's go to the hood.' Who's there? Black people. (Earl, personal communication, February 25, 2014).

This lack of meaningful opportunity is a multilayered obstacle because absence of opportunity not only leads to discontent and perpetual violence, but it also means that outreach workers' energies have to be focused on sudden violent incidents rather than focusing on more long-term community building – ultimately the only way to diminish violence in the long run. On one hand, it is imperative to stabilize the community by dealing with crises. However, this demand decreases the time and attention available to focus on more long-term changes. This is perhaps a vicious cycle that will continue until larger, structural changes are made.

### **Structural Deficits**

As this suggests, in addition to all the obstacles and challenges specific to the street outreach and intervention field, this work is situated within an overarching context of clear, larger structural deficits. Systemic problems related to poverty, race, inadequate healthcare, crime, and poor education are prevalent in these target communities. Though street outreach workers must focus a significant amount of time on individuals and groups in their daily responsibilities, this cannot solely be the goal of this work. To focus only on the individual results ignores the many larger, underlying issues. An intervention worker articulates his perspective on this issue:

People's not understandin' our youth or what they're going through, but they're only lookin' at the problem with these kids, are actin' out and... either stealin', or fighting, or... poor grades, or... dropouts, whatever it is, pregnancy...it's all these problems, but what causin' these problems to exist? You know, lack of... family support... a drug addiction... abuse, neglect, it's all these other things that's goin' on but where is the help

and the solutions to these problems? Instead of just punishing our youth, they're either in prison or takin' away from their home, you know, foster care system, and it's just creatin' more and more problems" (Anthony, personal communication, January 24, 2014).

He raises the point that much of what we do to address social problems is reactive in nature and notes that it would behoove our society to identify and address the root causes of these problems rather than simply responding to them after the fact. Another interventionist acknowledges his aggravation with this issue:

It can get frustrating sometimes doin' this intervention work. The poverty, you know, work, education. (A'Don, personal communication, July 15, 2014).

Further, he indicates that these are not impossible problems to solve:

It's the same shit that's been happenin' since day one. You know, tribal, territorial, about drugs, women, money... No jobs and stuff. All that can be controlled... That's...my frustration, the political part. (A'Don, personal communication, July 15, 2014).

According to this worker, there is a certain bureaucratic or political element related to the continuation of systemic problems and reactive responses. Instead of reorganizing societal structures to prevent the reoccurrence of certain problems, many entities focus on reacting to issues only after they have occurred. In this way, the larger macro-structural context is perpetuating these problems, and in the absence of the political will to tackle these surrounding issues, this work is akin to swimming upstream in a strong current.

Another interventionist gives an example of how the criminal justice system in particular tends to perpetuate this cycle of addressing problematic behavior after the fact. He explains that the authorities have systematic procedures for how to classify and track gang members but no

methods in place for helping “get people out of gangs” or rehabilitate. He indicates this is particularly the case in prisons:

You know, you really look at society, you’re like, ‘Wow... this really where we want to place our kids at?’ ...And, ‘This where we’re gonna punish ‘em?’ ...but not really lookin’ at rehabilitation... and that’s another key point right there... in our prison system or even in society itself... there’s one program I really want to try to get...dealin’ with gangs. If you can track all the gang members like they do, and track all the gangs, and place people in gang files... some of ‘em... even not in gangs... law enforcement make up gang names... how come when they go to court, the court don’t order that this member... should be enrolled in a gang exoneration program. Why is there nothin’ to show that we can get people out of gangs instead of puttin’ ‘em in a prison where gangs fest and migrate...So, you not helpin’ the problem. You’re not a rehabilitation center.... You gotta look at all these elements that’s goin’ on in society... and if there’s some pieces that we can probably put in place or have our political leaders... make some legislations and...be able to put some things out there for our youth, to help them, not to convict them. (Anthony, personal communication, January 24, 2014).

Again, he is calling for a restructuring of how societal issues are addressed. He notes that true sustainable change for these target communities will require some different approaches, because current methods are “not helpin’ the problem,” and he believes this may only happen with the passing of some new legislation. Another street outreach worker further elaborates on the plethora of issues he faces as part of his routine work responsibilities in the field:

And, that’s another part of bein’ in intervention. It ain’t just gangs...it’s all kind of problems out here in the streets, mostly poverty and stuff. Then, along with the drugs,

alcohol, you know, prostitution... we just can't be focused just on gang intervention. That's how...I pretty much stepped into some shit and I got my work cut out, and it doesn't compensate, ain't no money that's gonna compensate all the shit they want you to cover bein' an intervention worker. I guess it's pretty much like bein' a police officer.... They got to handle everything that's out there in the streets. They got to clean up that mess. And, sometimes, it's up to us... to clean it up before it becomes a mess, or clean it up after it's a mess...we're involved one way or another. (A'Don, personal communication, July 15, 2014).

The street outreach and intervention field involves much more than just gang-focused work. Interventionists encounter issues involving drug addiction, mental health problems, prostitution, grief, and violence when dealing with their target population. This worker expresses how draining his responsibilities can be considering he has to be prepared to address a multitude of problems or struggles on any given day. These interventionists are keenly aware that these problems are also perpetuated by the larger structural deficits in the community, but feel relatively powerless to make much change on that macro level.

## **Chapter 6. Street Outreach: Identified Needs**

Given the street outreach worker perspective on who interventionists are, the work they do in their communities, what it takes to fill this role, and the challenges and obstacles they face, it is crucial to identify what they need to be more effective in their work. I tapped into this issue by asking each research subject the “million dollar question,” or essentially what he or she would do with a suddenly unlimited budget. Street outreach and intervention workers discuss a plethora of needs both for their specific duties in their field as well as for their communities on a larger scale. It might easily become overwhelming for one to begin to grasp these deficits; however, these are also specific areas identified as worthy of attention. Further, each of these needs merits a targeted approach for resolution. These needs include stable funding streams channeled specifically for intervention work; a continually developing respect for and professionalism within the street outreach field; gainful employment opportunities in these target neighborhoods; and resources allocated specifically for violence prevention and the education system in these communities.

### **Stable Funding Sources**

The first need intervention workers identify is sufficient and stable funding for their work. Street outreach and intervention organizations must be able to demonstrate their efforts and future goals, objectives, and implementation procedures to procure potential funding sources. Municipal entities are not likely to fund or continue to fund this work without a clear plan in place, and, at least in the past, this has been problematic for the securing of funds. However, more recently, these workers acknowledge that they must be able to work within this type of system at least to some extent. An intervention worker with significant expertise in the field states:

We're never gonna get the municipalities to truly support the work. And, this is no excuse for any of 'em. But, they're not going to...effectively support the work if we can't come in and show them...a defined road map of how to get from A to Z. They have always used it as an excuse, 'Well, we come in and we supply these funds...and there's no...real solutions at the end of the day,' ... they've always had a backdoor to...go right out the process. If they come in and truly see...constituents that... know what they're doin', have a devised plan...have a structure in place, have the right expertise to drive that structure, and will drive that structure with or without their assistance...so be it. (Rasheed, personal communication, October 14, 2014).

These outreach workers recognize the value in adhering to clearly defined protocols and procedures in this field. Not only does this help facilitate completion of daily responsibilities and increase safety for all involved, it also creates a system of accountability for the work. However, it is important to note that workers in the street intervention and outreach field cannot wait for adequate funding to be in place before they fulfill their duties on the streets. He further explains that, obviously, a larger budget would allow more work to be done, but that it cannot dictate whether or not the work gets done; the work must go on, even with limited funding:

If we had additional resources...we could...affect more people for the constructive, progressive change. We can broaden our scope of work. We can do far more. But, what I can't do is sit here and wait for people to become right-minded and right-hearted to do the right damn thing. We have so many damn bodies layin' in the streets...okay, our people need to be paid and need to be paid well. But, what I'm not gonna do is let that stop the process while we're waiting for that payment to come in. Now, granted, we're

not gonna be able to be nowhere nearly as effective as we can if we're operating on a C or a D budget, you know? (Rasheed, personal communication, October 14, 2014).

A community activist with a long history of work experience and significant expertise in the field of education articulates her perspective on how street outreach and intervention services should be given consistent financial backing. She notes that many of these workers are focused on saving children in the community and are also responsible for providing for their own families:

Some of them are making a difference - those interventionists – but... somebody... needs to give them a job makin' some money so they can take care of their family while they're out here saving some of the children. And, they really are. (Lena, personal communication, April 4, 2014).

She further indicates that whether or not street outreach workers are financially providing for a family, they should still receive a living wage for their work in the community. Based on her significant experience working with the public school system as both a teacher and an administrator, she even suggests that perhaps some of this funding should be provided by education funding streams in schools with known gang problems:

Whoever has some money should give them some money so they can take care of their families along with helping the people... in the street, the gang.... Because... they have families, so somebody has money somewhere... Give them a decent salary... because they have families. And say if they don't have families, they are young men and they need to live at a level, and they are doin' the work - why not pay them.... The schools, the board of education could put money in the budget just for that... And, we know we have gangs in school. (Lena, personal communication, April 4, 2014).

She raises an interesting point with her statement that “somebody has money somewhere,” especially given her extensive history of exposure to even just the education system budget for her district. It is reasonable to conclude that funds do exist that could be allocated specifically for prevention and intervention efforts in these neighborhoods.

### **Respect and Professionalism**

Historically, those not directly involved in the street outreach and intervention field have had little to no understanding of what this work entails. More recently, there has been a push to professionalize this work and establish systematic protocols and procedures. For this reason, there is an ongoing need to develop respect for and professionalism within the street outreach field. Of course, interventionists believe in what they are doing for their communities, are committed to their work, and have made the choice to dedicate themselves to making progress in this field. Ultimately, they are not focused on convincing others to support their work or essentially to sell their vision to potential funders or other stakeholders in the community. However, they do need to develop some level of cooperation and ability to interact professionally with other stakeholders in their target neighborhoods, and though funding streams cannot be the top motivating factor for anything these individuals do, funding is a concern at some level. An intervention expert voices his perspective on how his top priority is the professional delivery of services in his community; he wants above all to be respected for what he does and secondarily considers funding issues:

I don't try to make people believe in what the hell we're doin'. This is critical. Usually, people are tryin' to make other people believe that they're trying to get something from them. I don't give a damn what you have, I'm tryin' to save lives, restore communities, provide hope, and implement proactive solutions, that's my goal. Now, you're either

gonna be with that or you're gonna not be with that. So, I'm not looking for...your funding. Your funding will definitely help me to improve the process and move the process forward. But, that funding cannot be my driver because if it's my driver, you control me and/or you're gonna make me do things your way. If you truly believe in what I'm doin', you're gonna side with me as a partner and then we're gonna get it done. And, once that happens, I'll bring you into these environments to where you can see the real results of what we do. I'll bring you to the training center, I'll bring you to...our...youth program, I'll bring you to our collaborative, unified, community meetings to where you can see people truly workin' together for the greater cause. But, I'm not gonna waste my time tryin' to convince you... unfortunately, we have so much of that going on in the work because people are trying to sustain themselves...I don't give a damn what your process is, what you think, what you see. If you're really down...I'm here for you. If you're not, you know, get the hell out of my face, 'cause at the end of the day, this is my community and we are truly trying to create substantiated change for the betterment in these communities. That's the goal. (Rasheed, personal communication, October 14, 2014)

As a whole, the field is deserving of ever growing respect as those involved demonstrate increasing expertise and professionalism. Once again, he is highlighting the tension that exists in this field between the need for respect and credibility among stakeholders and the importance of maintaining the integrity and values of the work, and, therefore, the trust of the target communities.

These workers undergo a variety of training classes as they prepare to carry out their responsibilities in the streets. This training helps standardize the protocols and procedures across

intervention organizations, which in turn increases the safety of those involved. One interventionist indicates that he has learned the importance of being able to dialogue with media personnel in his community:

That goes for any intervention worker. You got to be able to... you on the scene and the news camera put a microphone in front of your face, you got to know how to talk. I know how to represent as an intervention worker. You know, I gotta be strong,... that's... one of the things The Brotherhood Academy is trainin' us to do. (A'Don, personal communication, July 15, 2014).

Another interventionist describes some other types of training street outreach workers must complete as a means of becoming more effective practitioners and also increasing the level of professionalism in the field as a whole:

The type of trainin' they give out to... the violence part... protectin' yourself, how to dialogue with the police and how to dialogue with the situation, even if you gettin' robbed, you know, the crime scene and stuff like that. Like I said, PACE is sendin' us to a QuickBooks class, how to take care of our books... We need to...keep the trainin', we got to keep growin', keep the meetin's, we got to say on top of the game... Might be some new stuff to learn, 'cause it's like time changes - we in different times now. You know, that whole gang mentality has changed too. Like I said, most of the violence is domestic... We have to recertify, and like I said, they bringin' prevention into the picture now; so they teach some of the intervention workers how to get involved...outside of just gang intervention...you want to be year round, you don't want to be just seasonal. (A'Don, personal communication, October 29, 2013).

He raises the interesting point that training must increase and evolve to correspond to the needs of this work. This includes keeping abreast of violence in the community and adapting as the nature of this violence shifts from mostly gang-related incidents to the more currently increasing domestic or relationship-based issues in the streets. Also, as outreach workers are able to help stabilize the violence in their communities, they can then implement more prevention strategies and programs, rather than focusing most heavily on crisis response measures.

The standardization of protocols and procedures is another way to increase the respect for and level of professionalism in the street outreach and intervention field. Certainly this does not mean that there is only one right way to work in this field. Given that it is community-specific to a large degree, there must be some flexibility in any kind of established system for this work. However, it is possible to standardize some foundational aspects that can increase safety and help increase efficiency in implementation of prevention and intervention strategies. According to this intervention expert, different communities will still need locale-specific training and services, but there should be a universal “skeletal infrastructure” for operation guidelines. This allows others working in the same situation to anticipate actions and manage some level of risk. He explains:

It really wouldn't be they're trained the same way, but...foundationally, they would have the same skeletal infrastructure. So, when I stepped into your venue, there's certain things I know that you would do. You're gonna operate this way. What would be different is the skin that we put on...that skeleton...your region is different than mine, so when I stepped into your region... You would take the lead because your skin is gonna be different. You got to tell me what that skin looks like... We're gonna move a certain way... In this type of crisis, we're gonna do this... So, I don't have to worry about you. And, if a

crisis...engulfs us, I know at the end of the day, 'Well, okay, she's gonna do A, B, and C, because this is what we trained to do. So, if I don't see her in eight minutes, I know she's gonna be back at the command post, and that's where I'm going.'" As opposed to trying to go find her all over the place. (Rasheed, personal communication, October 14, 2014).

### **Job Opportunities**

On a broader scale, street intervention workers indicate that perhaps the most pressing community need is access to gainful employment opportunities for their neighborhood residents. For youth, this means vocational training programs and perhaps some form of employment. Increasing the availability of vocational opportunities for young people encourages their involvement in constructive activities and also prepares them possible future employment options. It can also help intervention organizations become self-sustainable depending on the types of vocational programs implemented as this worker suggests:

What we want to try to do is basically provide some of those type of programs in a vocational way... even like the media and... studio... all this stuff that the kids like, music and stuff like that. Get 'em interested in somethin' else...And, also bein' self-sustainable... at the same time. Gotta figure out a way how to be self-sustainable...So, my things is to try to... do automotive and restorations, and restore old vehicles, and turn around and re-sell them... Fix and repair cars...it's always gonna be a demand in repairin' vehicles. As long as people drivin' 'em.... It's just a combination of things that create... different avenues to... reduce the violence, and then target the gangs at the same time of... non-violence. (Anthony, personal communication, January 24, 2014).

It is an ongoing frustration in these target communities that even if residents prepare for the job market by completing required education and trainings, many of them remain unselected

for interviews, let alone being offered employment positions. The national disparities in unemployment<sup>2</sup> and underemployment<sup>3</sup> rates are evident in these communities. In neighborhoods in which gang activity is prevalent and there is a lack of access to other viable options, young people often choose the gang route. This community activist who specializes in labor and employment issues in his neighborhood shares his views on how obtaining a good job might be all a youth needs to avoid becoming involved in gang violence and the illicit drug market:

Everybody's doin' all these different things, which are good, but it's not dealin' with... the main issue, which to me is money, employment. I just read an article today that black unemployment is double any other race's unemployment rate. I'm not sayin' that... black people are angels, I mean, we got work to do too, in terms of... gettin' yourself educated and ready to go. But, the numbers don't lie. We're twice the national average in unemployment. So, that tells you right there that somethin's wrong. So... to me, I'm just speakin' from my own experience, I grew up in South Central... gangbanging, drug dealin', all that was at my front door. When I walk out the door, that's what I see. (Earl, February 25, 2014).

He further explains that he reached a pivotal point at the age of 18 when he either could have become more involved with his friends in the streets or he could accept a lucrative job with his city and not have to be concerned with many of the repercussions of gang life:

When I was 18, I had two ways to go. You know, these guys are makin' a thousand bucks a day sellin' dope, right? I mean... let's just face it - they're makin' good money. But then I got this job, I'm like, 'Okay, cool. I don't have to worry about goin' to jail.

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<sup>2</sup> Blacks have twice the unemployment rate as compared to the national average (U.S. Department of Labor, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> The underemployment rate for Black youth is twice as high compared to White youth (Wilson, 2015).

Nobody kickin' in my door. Nobody raidin' my house'. (Earl, personal communication, February 25, 2014).

Another community advocate shares her views on how important it is for community residents, especially fathers, to be able to work and provide for their families:

We gonna have to shore up the family structure. Okay? Jobs, people in the community... the fathers, whether they're in the home, they need a job. They need some kind of income just to make them feel good. How... do you take care of your family and... you can't take care of yourself. (Lena, personal communication, April 4, 2014).

She raises the crucial point that gainful employment can boost self-esteem. The inability to work and support oneself, much less one's family can be quite damaging to the confidence of residents in these neighborhoods. One might argue that under such circumstances, in which community members are essentially set up to fail, it is logical to a point that such individuals seek alternative, albeit illegitimate, means to earn a living. In this sense, the work that these interventionists are doing is stymied, at least in part, because without larger structural changes in gainful employment availability, this cycle will most likely repeat itself.

### **Resources for Education and Prevention**

The final need for these target communities, as identified by my interviewees, is additional resources that specifically target violence prevention measures and the education system as a whole in these communities. Much of what outreach workers do on a daily basis involves various violence prevention strategies; these include but are not limited to safe passage negotiation, rumor control and other types of collaboration with their counterparts in other neighborhoods, and mentoring. It is crucial that interventionists are able to prevent some violence rather than simply responding to incidents that have already occurred. Due to their

credibility in their respective communities, or LTO, these workers can often prevent violence simply by dialoguing with the appropriate parties. This intervention worker describes how this is possible:

So, we prevented... someone to do violence.... And I'm tryin' to really define and categorize that based upon the work that we're doin', and the incidents that occur because if we only doin' somethin' after the fact, then we too late. We want to do somethin' before the fact. So, now need to be puttin' more resources in violence prevention. And, that's just like... knowin' a guy, friend, gettin' ready to go through somethin', and we talk him down. We talk him down. 'Nah, put that up, man. Don't even, don't even do that.' That's violence prevention 'cause an act hasn't occurred yet. He hadn't shot nobody and did no harm to nobody, but he has the potential to act in violence right now.

(Anthony, personal communication, January 24, 2014).

Unfortunately, both the lack of general steady funding availability and the fact that some institutions are resistant to this work prevent street outreach and intervention from being as widely practiced as these workers believe it could be. For example, violence prevention measures should be a major concern for the schools in these target communities. Some schools allow interventionists to operate safe passage programs to help keep young people safe as they walk to and from school each day. However, these workers are often not permitted to be on school grounds and many do not receive funding from the schools to provide these services. Many of these individuals have to secure funding elsewhere to make this program possible, and this is a clear area in which funding should be specifically allocated for interventionists to work the perimeters of and perhaps even on the school campuses in these neighborhoods. Street outreach workers recognize the areas near schools as highly probable locations for children and

youth to be victimized by gangs. An outreach worker describes how interventionists must stay close to the schools to continue to keep students safe:

I've been workin' with the school for the last three years now, and this third year, right now, they might end up movin' to another facility. And, if they move... the one on Pultney and Geneva, then it may help me to get more... funding for more guys because now it's a bigger area, more coverage.... And, it's already... a school right across the street... There are already a school on across Geneva... and you still got Trankel Square Middle School down the street, and you got Clarksbary High School... and then the charter school, Robeson High, all right there. So, when them kids let out, it's gonna be a fluctuated of kids right there, and it's a great opportunity for these gang members to go out there and try to get their iPods or their phones and... attackin' these kids. So, we want to make sure these kids gonna be safe around that area. So... hopefully, if they do move there, we can probably get more staff hired on for the Safe Passage. (Anthony, personal communication, January 24, 2014).

On a broader scale, intervention workers note that the education system disproportionately favors young people in more affluent communities and does a grave disservice to children in their own neighborhoods. It is unjust that youth do not have equal access to quality education regardless of home zip codes, and schools in poorer communities often have disproportionately lower high school graduation and college attendance or completion rates compared to those in wealthier areas. Many intervention workers grew up and attended schools in their target communities, so they personally experienced these discrepancies. One street outreach worker indicates that these circumstances have not changed in his community:

If the education continues the way that it's going, and it's funded the way that it's funded... I would... definitely... try to put somethin' into education.... Because our... education systems are failing, really failing.... And it's all because of where the areas that a person... lives in or whatnot, or where they're gettin' their education from... You know, so... we will want the same education for the kids in our school that... the kids that live in The Hamptons... that go to The Hamptons High Schools. You know, they have all these outrageous numbers of how their kids are all graduating from high school, and they're all going to college, and they're all getting... private funding to pay for their education, where their parents don't have to and all this and that, and federally funded money and everything. And, that's because of the area that they reside in, because of their zip code. (Darien, personal communication, March 6, 2014).

The schools in these target neighborhoods clearly need additional resources to increase the safety of students and school personnel and to improve the learning environment. Children need to be able to get to and from school safely and study in facilities that are conducive to learning during these formative years. Many of these youth will have already become involved in gang or other crime related activities prior to reaching high school age if they are not presented with healthy alternatives and do not have the opportunity to interact with positive role models at a young age. This street outreach worker articulates his rather somber perspective on whether young people in his community are likely to succeed:

Our issue is the youth because the ones that are here now are gonna have one of two ways to go. And, they're gonna be out the way. And that's just... the horrible truth.... But I would invest in... our youth because the better chance they got at the start, the better

chance they're gonna have at the finish. If they get a good start, they're gonna come out victorious. (Darien, personal communication, March 6, 2014).

Ultimately, street outreach workers recognize that the work they are doing is crucial for their neighborhoods, but they are clear-eyed that it is limited without stable resources and the organizational development that would help to increase steady funding streams, which in turn would better the work overall.

## Chapter 7. Discussion

The purpose of this dissertation research project was to capture a culturally sensitive depiction of how community organizations, particularly those driven by street outreach interventionists, collaborate to reduce violence and strengthen communities from within. I set out to explore collaboration in gang intervention work because the literature is sparse in this area, and the literature that does exist is rather vague about how true collaboration actually plays out on the ground. It is crucial for researchers and practitioners to understand how it works because gang violence remains an extensive problem with layers of negative consequences for many communities and cities. Los Angeles in particular was an ideal location to conduct this study since historically, it has been plagued with more gang violence than most other areas in the United States. In fact, though gang violence has been reduced, it is still a major problem in many Los Angeles communities.

I was originally invited to attend meetings and learn about the work the Partnership for Advocacy and Community Empowerment (PACE) organization was doing along with its collaborating agencies in Los Angeles. After I established my role as a graduate student researcher, PACE and its affiliates agreed to allow me to conduct participant observations and semi-structured interviews about collaboration in street outreach work. I conducted interviews and follow-up interviews with street outreach workers, law enforcement officials, education personnel, a clergy member, a community task force board member, a PACE board member, a labor and employment activist, and a community advocate.

This research indicates that the PACE collaborative street outreach efforts in Los Angeles are primarily driven by reformed gang members who work as interventionists in their target communities. These individuals have strong community ties to these neighborhoods since most

of them grew up in these areas. They have deep roots in these target neighborhoods and many feel that since they were involved in creating the gang problem, they must now give back by being a part of eradicating gang violence. This process becomes possible as they identify others of like mind with whom to collaborate in these efforts. The PACE organization provides funding to six intervention programs in these target neighborhoods.

Street outreach workers must fulfill a host of tasks and responsibilities on any given day. Essentially, they wear many hats, and they must be flexible and willing to adapt to a variety of situations that may arise. This project reveals that for true collaboration to occur, street outreach workers must be willing and able to build relationships with their fellow outreach workers in surrounding neighborhoods. This is no easy task as it means establishing a system of proactive communication across rival or enemy lines. Conflict management is a vital part of this work, and collaboration across gang lines is crucial to violent incident response and the reduction of retaliatory shootings and killings. In addition to working directly with gang members, interventionists also show daily presence around school zones, and they work in additional areas to negotiate safe passage for community members through gang territories. Further, they host and participate in a variety of community building events to increase prosocial activities and improve community relations in their respective neighborhoods.

Due to the specific nature of street outreach and intervention work, there are several essential characteristics for the individuals who work in this field. First, they must have a high level of street credibility (or, what my interviewees refer to as a “license to operate”) in their target communities. This trait allows them to interrupt the cycle of violence with something as simple as a conversation in many cases. Because of the level of respect they have earned, they can impact not only the residents of their own neighborhoods, but also those in adjacent

communities. Additionally, since most street outreach workers live and work in their neighborhoods of origin, they have a valuable insider perspective on what their target communities need. Considering that many of these communities are reluctant to trust outsiders, it is invaluable to have interventionists who are lifelong residents of the target communities rather than attempting to bring in outside programs or “experts.”

Further, street outreach workers must have a deep commitment to intervention work because it is often dangerous, emotionally taxing, underfunded, and essentially requires these individuals to be on-call around the clock. They must be willing to undergo any necessary training and continually must balance the expertise they bring to the work because of their own personal experiences with the need to increasingly professionalize the field as more research is done and funders require an increasing level of accountability. This is a delicate balance because no amount of training can substitute for the kind of life experiences that uniquely equip outreach workers to do intervention work. Essentially, it is impossible to train someone into having a license to operate. However, intervention work is becoming more professionalized and systematic in some specific ways. It is at the intersection of relevant personal experience and professionalization that street outreach workers are best equipped to collaborate with each other in their intervention efforts. Interventionists must be able to leave behind past criminal behavior while maintaining the credibility and relationships with community members that, in many cases, was made possible because of that past criminal behavior.

This research indicates that street outreach workers face a multitude of challenges and obstacles working in this capacity. First, the nature of this work is often quite dangerous. Outreach workers typically live and work in neighborhoods with elevated levels of violence, and they play a large role in responding to shootings, killings, and other high-risk situations. These

individuals risk their own safety to improve the safety of their communities. Also, outreach workers must address the cycle of negative thinking caused by the pervasiveness of the gang mentality among their target populations. Due to the lack of opportunities in these neighborhoods, many individuals use illegitimate and often dangerous means to attain status and wealth, and eventually, they become caught up in a lifestyle they do not believe they can escape. For this reason, outreach workers must not only overcome their own personal experiences with crime and violence, but they must also be equipped to teach their fellow community residents new ways of thinking, coping, and behaving.

Additionally, interventionists must learn how to set appropriate and functional boundaries with law enforcement personnel in their target neighborhoods. This can be challenging on several levels. In general, many of these urban communities have a volatile history with law enforcement, and many street outreach workers have personal histories of varying levels of criminal justice system involvement, including negative interactions with police. Since interventionists must maintain street credibility, or the license to operate in their neighborhoods, they cannot function as informants or be seen as “snitches” in any way. However, outreach workers and law enforcement personnel must develop a working relationship and learn to coexist in these environments.

There is also ongoing concern regarding how to sustain intervention work over time. The current generation of street outreach workers is aging, and the intensity of this work requires that interventionists function in fairly rigorous working conditions. Therefore, current outreach workers must identify and train a new generation of interventionists while simultaneously addressing the recurring challenge of maintaining true collaboration across agencies. Varying and occasionally opposing agency perspectives and missions make it crucial for street outreach

workers to identify potential community partners, and to maintain open lines of communication with collaborating agencies that agree on the purpose and main goals of prevention and intervention work.

Overwhelmingly, a lack of resources and consistent funding streams continues to be a major obstacle to street outreach efforts. Interventionists regularly risk their own safety and work around the clock without being paid sufficient wages to support themselves or their families. This is problematic because many of them are forced to take on other jobs and find additional sources of income, which then limits their availability to focus on street outreach work. This increases burnout and turnover in the field, which in turn produces organizational dysfunction and instability.

Finally, in addition to the obstacles and challenges interventionists face specific to street outreach efforts, their work is also situated within a larger context of structural concerns and systemic problems related to concentrated poverty in these areas, race and discrimination issues, inadequate healthcare, crime, and poor education. There is a glaring absence of opportunity in these communities. Youth do not have access to high quality education, exposure to the arts, and a variety of other prosocial activities and opportunities to build life skills, and adults do not have access to legitimate and meaningful vocational and employment opportunities. In these conditions, street outreach workers are faced with the challenge of intervening in street crime and violence at the ground level without having the structural systems in place to support desistance from violence and ongoing community improvement.

### **Policy Implications**

In light of the lengthy list of obstacles and challenges street outreach workers face on a regular basis, I explored what interventionists identified as their most pressing needs to do this

work. First, stable and adequate funding streams must be put in place. If reformed gang members, law enforcement officials, education personnel, and other community members recognize the value and importance of having street outreach workers in their neighborhoods, the current inconsistent, inadequate system of funding must be changed. Interventionists should earn a living wage and should not have to worry about whether they can support themselves or their families. Further, they should not be required to sacrifice the integrity of their work by succumbing to the whims and agendas of potential funding sources. Ultimately, outreach workers must adhere to the methods they have developed and refined over time to ensure the best service delivery to their target populations. Currently, many street outreach workers receive funding from private sources, but these funding streams can be inconsistent at best. Ideally, as street outreach is more widely recognized and accepted as beneficial to prevention and intervention work, funding will become more stable. However, it is important to note that this may or may not be possible without some specific political intervention by individuals with significant influence.

Increasing respect for intervention efforts, and continued professionalization of this work, are also necessary and perhaps closely related to establishing consistent and adequate funding for outreach workers. Intervention organizations have developed initial and ongoing training courses for street outreach workers, and this will help in establishing a systematic format for implementing policies and procedures in this work. Certain methods or techniques may differ based upon the given target population, but overall, increasing professionalization, or uniformity in service delivery and shared expectations for how fellow interventionists will move and operate in the field, can increase the safety and effectiveness of all involved. An increased level of

professionalism in street outreach can also increase the level of respect for intervention work from outside agencies, both public and private.

Thirdly, these target communities are in dire need of legitimate, gainful employment opportunities. It is insufficient to expect vulnerable populations to desist from violence and other criminal activity without presenting them with viable alternative options. It is certainly critical to reduce bloodshed and stabilize these environments. Outreach workers indicate that the first priority in this work is crisis intervention. They respond to a wide range of violent incidents and must stabilize these situations prior to implementing any other strategies. However, the next step must be to offer reasonable alternatives for livelihood in order to maintain these improved community conditions over time. Policy makers should prioritize employment opportunities for these target communities to help promote lasting change.

Lastly, there is a need for resources dedicated specifically to education and prevention efforts. Children in these communities typically do not have access to high quality education, which in turn leaves them ill equipped for future success in the job market. Additionally, many do not have the opportunity to participate in a variety of positive social and skills-building activities, and instead, they often become involved with gang and other criminal activity at a young age. It should be considered a cost-effective prevention measure to provide funding channeled specifically to address these issues, and it could potentially have a much stronger impact on youth than our currently more reaction-based criminal justice system. Current practice overwhelmingly tends to funnel children and youth from schools and the streets into punishment-focused settings, rather than focus on preventing negative behavior and crime in the first place. This is extremely problematic for these communities. Similar to the need for increased employment opportunities, these target areas need higher quality education and early

intervention services for children and youth. Otherwise, street outreach workers will remain in the cycle of responding to one gang crisis after another rather than having the opportunity to make some lasting community improvements.

### **Limitations**

This qualitative research project provides an on the ground look at a collaborative effort in gang prevention and intervention work in several target communities in Los Angeles. Street outreach workers, or interventionists, primarily drive these efforts, and this study explores the nature of this work and how it happens on a daily basis. Though I attempted to minimize the limitations of this study, there are some potential concerns. First, it is possible that my presence as a student researcher, as well as my own perspective, could have biased my research. I am an outsider to my research subject population in several ways. I am a white female from the upper-middle class, and my research subject population comprises mostly black individuals from lower socioeconomic status communities. However, I attempted to address this potential issue by spending sufficient time in the field building relationships with my pool of research subjects.

Additionally, I was able to take the student role with my interviewees since I am a transplant from the East Coast and claim no level of expertise on Los Angeles, gang culture, or outreach work. For this reason, I believe being an outsider on several levels actually may have benefitted my research since I was not presenting myself as any sort of local “expert,” and instead I was in a position for my interview subjects to teach me what they thought was most important for me to know. Further, I believe my interviewees and I had a sufficient level of rapport because we had many candid conversations about class, white privilege and other race issues, as well as how these things are related to other structural problems in our society. My interviewees appeared to be comfortable enough to be honest and direct during our interactions.

Another potential limitation to this project is that it focuses on one specific street outreach collaborative in Los Angeles, and therefore it is not necessarily representative of all outreach efforts across the city. The scope of this project provides an on the ground look at how collaboration occurs in street outreach work, but this process might be different with other agencies or perhaps in other target communities. More broadly, intervention efforts in other cities, states, or countries potentially could be significantly different based on the unique needs of the given target populations. This lack of generalizability is a caveat for any qualitative case study research and is not unique to this project. The current case study can provide insights that may well be applicable in other inner-city settings or similar neighborhoods.

Lastly, I did not have access to law enforcement or street outreach data or records to corroborate what I was hearing in meetings and during interviews about intervention efforts and crime and violence reduction. I was told this data does exist currently in some form but that it is not maintained in a large, organizational database at this time. Interestingly, however, there was some general consistency across my interviews in the perspectives on how street outreach work is important, needed, and positively impacts the target communities.

### **Future Research**

The current project was designed to “unpack” the notion of collaboration specifically as it pertains to gang prevention and intervention work. However, future research should focus on evaluations of this type of work. This would require increased funding in this area. An attempt to evaluate the street outreach work that is happening on the ground currently is somewhat impractical due to how under-resourced it is. Perhaps with a clear investment and sufficient funding streams to implement outreach services more fully, we would create the opportunity to conduct fair and precise evaluations. It seems counterintuitive to evaluate whether a given

program or service is effective without first providing adequate funding for full implementation. This project was not an evaluation, and further research would benefit if well-resourced street outreach programs existed and could be studied. First, this would provide the conditions necessary to conduct an in-depth evaluation of program effectiveness across a variety of outcomes. Additionally, it would create an opportunity to study what this type of work might actually look like if it were more reliably resourced with consistent funding streams.

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## APPENDIX A

### Semi-Structured Interview Guide

- 1) Organization with which the subject is affiliated
  - a. Tell me about the mission of your organization
  - b. What is the history of your organization
  - c. What's the breakdown of the staffing/volunteering
  - d. What kinds of programs or services are offered
  - e. How do you track what you do – how is it measured
  - f. What is your organization's connection to the target community
  - g. What are the barriers to service
  - h. Million dollar question – If I could give your organization a million dollars, what would it be used for first?
- 2) Job description of the subject
  - a. What is your job title?
  - b. Can you describe a typical day in your job
  - c. What programs or services are you directly involved with
  - d. What programs or services are you indirectly involved with
  - e. What skills/training are needed for this job
  - f. What is your relationship to the target community/population(s)
  - g. What additional training would be helpful
  - h. Describe the barriers to your work
  - i. Million dollar question – If I could give you a million dollars to spend at work, what would you want to do with it?
- 3) Collaboration effort and street outreach
  - a. Who is involved in the collaboration?
  - b. Relationship to and interactions with PACE and partnering organizations
  - c. Your level of involvement in the collaboration
  - d. What is the goal of the collaboration
  - e. What would successful collaboration look like
  - f. What has the collaboration process been like so far
  - g. What has been helpful
  - h. What are the challenges
  - i. What is needed moving forward
  - j. If you were in charge of this collaboration, how would you structure and run it?
- 4) What are the key elements for effective work in gang prevention and intervention (street outreach)?
- 5) What are the most problematic factors for work in gang prevention and intervention?
- 6) What have I not asked about that you think is important for me to know?