

## Street gangs in the greater Holland area

The "\$64,000 Question" in the minds and on the tongues of many concerned citizens, officials and the news media in the greater Holland area for the past few years has been, "Do we have street gangs in our area, and if we do, does a public admission cause to give validity to and strengthen the status of these gangs?"

Yes, we do have gangs in the greater Holland area. But, along with the admission of that fact is the need to define and categorize the true scope and nature of this problem.

It can be stated that based upon measurement criteria established thru research in various communities throughout the country that our community is in many ways not so very different from many other communities. But at the same time we can also state very emphatically that our community is different in that we have the desire, motivation, and ability to make positive change and address the gang issues facing us at this time.

In order to confirm the scope of the problem facing our community it is first important to recognize and define some of the constituent parts of the "gang" phenomena.

### I. What is a "gang"

- A. There are almost as many definitions of the word "gang" as there are gangs, although most research agrees on a basic definition that includes the following concepts:
  1. two or more people who form an allegiance for a common purpose
  2. Identifies with or claims a territory (either a geographical location or scope of crime)
  3. Engages individually or collectively in violence and/or other criminal activity

### II. How are gangs recognized?

- A. Clothing  
manner worn, colors, logos
- B. Colors  
predominant colors include blue/black (Black Gangster Disciples, Crips, local CWA-Crips with an Attitude, TRG Tiny Rascal Gangsters); red/black (Vice Lords, Bloods), and gold/black (Latin Kings)
- C. Emblems  
six point star(Disciples), five point star (Vice Lords), and three to five crown (Latin Kings)
- D. Graffiti  
marking of "territory", showing disrespect for rival gangs by inverting their imagery
- E. Jewelry  
gang insignias displayed on earrings, pendants pins, rings

point

**F. Hand signs**

used to identify fellow gang members and also to intimidate rivals

**G. Photos**

gang members often pose for photos while holding prized gang weapons and throwing gang signs

**H. Territory**

turf is often marked with gang graffiti

**I. Vocabulary**

"gangbanger", "Homeboy" or "Homie", etc.

**III. Who is the gang member? (information from Youth Gang Suppression and Intervention Program authored by School of Social Service Administration; University of Chicago in cooperation with Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention; U.S. Dept. of Justice. Grant No. 90-D-CX-K001)**

**A. range of types of youth**

1. some conform to conventional norms
2. most committed in varying degrees to a range of criminal behavior
3. research data shows indicates gang members generally (but not uniformly) more serious and frequent offenders and more likely to become career criminals than non-gang delinquents

**B. position or role of gang member is time limited; range of 14-24 yrs.**

**IV. Why is a person a "gang member"?**

**A. Most researchers agree that youth who willingly join gangs do so in an attempt to fulfill needs not satisfied in other aspects of life. These needs may be a sense of belonging, nurturing, economic opportunity. Yet this listing does not include one other very real need--excitement.**

**B. We live in a world which displays expressive brutality in many formats; TV, film, comic books, music**

**C.**

**V. How do we classify the nature and scope of the gang problem?**

**A. growth and spread of gang problem; two-fold categorization of the nature and scope has arisen; requiring distinctive responses**

**B. Chronic Problem**

1. long term violence and crises; over decades
2. usually impoverished ghettos, established transitional areas or ports of entry, or inner cities

**C. Emerging Problem**

1. occasional gang violence or drug trafficking which began over the past ten years
2. may be traced to newcomers from problem cities or contexts

3. youth gangs tend to be not well organized and most often evolve out of delinquent groups and changing social and economic situations within these cities or contexts