

# Building Healthier Communities

*Final Report on Community Recommendations  
for the Development of the Saskatchewan  
Prevention/Intervention Street Gang Strategy*

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STR8 UP 10,000 Little Steps to Healing's reference to "all our relations" is not only to blood relatives, but a relationship to all humans. For recovering street gang members, it is to discover and engage into a healing and healthy journey of wholesome and positive relationships. First and foremost is their discovery of a new and different relationship within themselves. This relationship is one of self-respect, self-worth and self-esteem. Secondly, it includes all members of the community in various and multitude ways within a journey of respect, honor, dignity, equality and justice for all. Thirdly, all of our lives are resting in complex universal realities. Humans are not the center of creation. STR8 UP members live by the truth that the world is to be respected and shared equally with all of creation. Finally, every person is a sacred being, sharing identical goodness with all aspects of creation as well with the Creator, Higher Power, God or Sacred Mystery. For STR8 UP members the transformation of their relationships is based on strong, positive spiritual values of honesty and humility.

Having facilitated numerous anti-street gang presentations throughout Saskatchewan, a common question we often ask the community is "why do young people join street gangs?" A common response to the question is "they want to belong". We then follow up my question by asking "Why do young people feel like they do not belong in their own community?" By rephrasing the question, it is our intention to help individuals understand that they too have a responsibility to make sure that young people in their community feel like they belong. This is why the development of this street gang strategy is so vital. Endlessly incarcerating street gang members has not worked. Instead we, as a community, need to redirect our attention from suppression to treatment and education. By doing this, STR8 UP members and others who may find themselves at greater risk have opportunities and become contributing members of our community.

It is through the questioning of how come that we have worked diligently to try and provide a way to begin to answer such questions in Saskatchewan. STR8 UP believes that it is the coming together of people and their ideas that will truly guide the development of the Saskatchewan Prevention/Intervention Street Gang Strategy.

Working in Solidarity,

**Fr. André Poilièvre, STR8 UP Founder**  
**Stan Tu'Inukuafe, Co-Founder and President of STR8 UP Board of Directors**  
**Alex Munoz, Executive Director, STR8 UP**



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## Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to provide the results of a community-engaged initiative with concrete recommendations that will guide the development of the Saskatchewan Prevention/Intervention Street Gang Strategy (SPISGS). The research was conducted by Dr. Robert Henry (University of Calgary), who was contracted in December 2018 to develop a community-engaged research process on the views of Saskatchewan residents on what they believe needs to occur to develop an inclusive community-led provincial street gang strategy. The final project was a report to the Government of Saskatchewan on recommendations and next steps to develop the SPISGS.

Guided by a community-engaged participatory research (CEPR) paradigm, the approach to the project included the following methods: a) electronic survey; b) an extensive literature review of street gang programming nationally and internationally; c) a community forum bringing together community, agencies, and knowledge experts; and d) community consultations.

The project was guided by STR8 UP 10,000 Little Steps to Healing, the Saskatchewan Ministries of Policing and Corrections, and Justice and Attorney General, Royal Canadian Mounted Police "F" Division, and

other stakeholders. Significant input was provided by this working group at every stage of the process, including thorough review of a draft report and its recommendations in August 2018.

## Street Gang Typology

It was noted from the outset that knowledge of street gangs is lacking in the province and that communities do not have the proper tools to evaluate the level of street gang activities and behaviours. Because of this it is difficult for communities to evaluate the need of street gang programming, or evaluate the effectiveness of the program itself. Therefore, the first priority of the report was to develop a street gang typology that can be used by communities to evaluate street gang activity or behavior, and be used by the strategy as it develops. The typology must be viewed as a living document, because as knowledge of street gangs increases and behaviours become targeted, street gangs will shift in order to maintain their power, status and control of illegal underground economies. As a result, the typology is intended to be broad enough to allow for the changes that may occur, but also allow communities to focus on specific targeted programming to deter violence associated to street gangs.

## Recommendations

Over the course of the project an abundance of themes and recommendations were discussed. The primary area of concern that communities had was related to limited or lack of stable funding for prevention and intervention programming. This was a theme that resonated across all community consultations, was described in the Street Gang Forum, as well as within the electronic surveys. However, it was discussed with communities that funding will continue to be an issue and that the focus needs to be on how resources need to be allocated to develop the strongest strategy that can encompass the needs of the people of Saskatchewan.

The data illustrated that there needs to be a clear leader for the strategy to be successful. It was revealed that due to their history of working in the area of street gang intervention and the relationships that they have built throughout the province, that STR8 UP seemed the logical leader for the strategy moving forward.

**Bringing together all of the collected data, 5 overarching themes or priorities emerged, each with their own sets of recommendations. These themes include:**

1. Infrastructure and leadership;
2. Addressing trauma, colonization, and settler colonialism;
3. Knowledge translation and mobilization;
4. Addressing systemic oppression and structural issues of poverty and homelessness;
5. Institutional supports.

In total 24 recommendations have been made in the report under the 5 themes. The recommendations focus on actionable calls to the Province of Saskatchewan and partners in the provincial street gang strategy to address the perceived issues of street gangs facing Saskatchewan communities today.

## Priorities and Next Steps

There is widespread consensus within the community consultations that the first priority is to define a leader for the SPISGS. STR8 UP continued to be looked to as the leader to head the strategy by communities because of its educational training through presentations, networks, and its programming model. With a leader for the SPISGS, community consultations had asked for a central location that they can reach out to for more information about street gangs in relation to prevention and intervention programming and general knowledge.

The second priority is to continue to develop the SPISGS within a community-engaged model. Through community engagement, consultations determined that communities would be more willing to support the provincial strategy as their voices could be heard. This will also shift the top-down approach that many communities feel continues to limit their abilities to address issues related to street gangs in real time. The third priority is to move forward with the implementation of the recommendations. The strategy should be supported quickly to maintain momentum with interested parties and show communities the willingness to build safer and healthier communities. With more media attention and a continued record of having a province with high rates of violence, addictions, and trauma, moving quickly to address such issues in a good way is important.



## Introduction

Saskatchewan and its communities continue to consistently lead the country in crime and violent crime, in relation to other provinces.<sup>1</sup> Much of this activity has been linked by media and isolated reports to the increase of street gangs, their activities, and the levels of violence that are associated with them. Historically, Saskatchewan has adopted a suppressive (i.e. incarceration) first approach to deal with street gangs; however with the continued increase in violence across the province a shift to address street gangs from localized prevention and intervention perspectives is beginning to make headway. To begin this movement, the grassroots organization STR8 UP 10,000 Little Steps to Healing, Inc. approached the Federal Government to provide funding to support the first steps in developing a provincial street gang strategy. Unlike other strategies that are focused on specific larger urban centres, the approach undertaken for this strategy acknowledges that Saskatchewan has a street gang culture that transcends local urban centres. Street gangs and their members are known to move between cities (Regina, Saskatoon, Prince Albert, North Battleford) as well as to smaller rural and reserve communities (Green Lake, La Ronge, Keeseekoose, etc.). It is because of this mobility and movement that STR8 UP has urged, in partnership with the Province of Saskatchewan, that the development of a prevention and

intervention provincial street gang strategy must be broad enough to include the complexities and social realities that many communities face. At the same time, the strategy must allow communities to have the ability to focus on specific community needs before they escalate to become involved with or form a local street gang. To accomplish this, the project looked to address two broad questions:

- 1) When does a group of individuals become a street gang?
- 2) What does your community need to target the prevention and intervention of street gangs?

## Methodology

To address these questions and engage multiple agencies, communities, and peoples from across the province, a community-engaged process that included four different stages were undertaken. These stages included: 1) the development of an electronic survey that was completed by nearly 500 individuals (Appendix A); 2) a literature review of street gangs in Saskatchewan (Appendix B); 3) a three day forum attended by over 90 government and community agencies and experts in street gang programming (Appendix C); and, 4) post-forum

<sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada. Police-reported Crime Statistics in Canada, 2016, by Kathryn Keighley, (Ottawa, ON: Juristat).

programming (Appendix C); and, 4) post-forum consultations held in six communities (Appendix D). The community consultations were attended by individuals from over twenty different communities across Saskatchewan. This broad approach was designed to collect information from those who are often ignored or do not have opportunities to participate in the development of strategies. The information collected is one of the largest undertaken in Saskatchewan to examine the issues of street gangs.

This report is the summation of the data collected from these four stages. It is intended to bring together the knowledges of the residents of Saskatchewan and what they believe is necessary to develop a provincial wide strategy. The information collected is both vast and informative; however specific themes have resonated that communities feel are necessary to define the issues of street gangs and to build the foundations of a provincial street gang strategy.

## Street Gang Typology

One of the biggest issues that continues to impact the effectiveness of street gang programs and strategies is the lack of understanding of the term street gang.<sup>2</sup> Understanding how street gangs differ from other groups of individuals, and when an activity becomes a street gang activity vary across jurisdictions. Even in Saskatchewan, individuals expressed that there is a variance to street gangs, i.e., a group that may be identified as a street gang in one community may not be a street gang in another. Due to the variance of street gangs and their activities across communities, it was noted within the literature review, that one way to address this issue and move beyond static definitions was to develop a street gang typology. Therefore, to address the variance in defining how street gangs differ from other youth and adult groups, the development of a typology was undertaken.

A typology, rather than static definitions of street gangs, is better suited to assist communities in evaluating local issues, the types and uses of violence that lead to the development of or an individual's involvement in street gangs. Firstly, in the hands of communities, a typology becomes a tool which may be used to assess the best prevention and intervention strategy(ies) to engage where individuals or groups are at, before they become entrenched in a street gang lifestyle. Secondly, a typology is important as it can help to support and evaluate comparative studies across locations.<sup>3</sup> Typologies are becoming more common within gang strategies and networks, such as the Eurogang network, as knowledge can be used to develop broader understandings of the street gang phenomenon.<sup>4</sup> It is also noted that embracing typologies, much the same as definitions, created outside of the communities that do not take into context the sociopolitical histories and legacies that have created the spaces for street gangs to form is problematic as it reinforces previously held stereotypes and myths. To develop a local understanding of the development of individuals to become engaged in a street gang, specific questions were asked to communities across Saskatchewan to best understand how a group of friends may progress to become a street gang, within a Saskatchewan context.

Information collected with communities shows that there is a lack of understanding of street gangs in general or what separates a street gang from a group of friends. For example, the electronic survey and community consultations reveal there was little difference when individuals were asked to answer "What do you think gangs offer?" and "What do a group of friends offer?". Responses to both questions were similar and included a sense of belonging, purpose, friendship, structure, and identity (see Appendix A for results from electronic survey). Community respondents found that there is little that differentiates what a group of friends and a street gang provides individuals. When asked about activities, respondents also noted that violence,

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2 Finn-Aage L. Esbensen, Thomas Winfree, Ni He, and Terrance J. Taylor, "Youth Gangs and Definitional Issues: When is a Gang a Gang, and Why Does it Matter?," *Crime & delinquency* 47, no. 1 (2001): 105-130; Hallsworth, *The Gang*; Klein and Maxson, *Gang Patterns*; Andrea Spindler and Martin Bouchard, "Structure or Behavior? Revisiting Gang Typologies," *International Criminal Justice Review* 21, no. 3 (2011): 263-282; Rob White, *Youth Gangs, Violence and Social Respect: Exploring the Nature of Provocations and Punch-ups* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013).

3 Cheryl L. Maxson (2001). A Proposal for Multi-Site Study of European Gangs and Youth Groups. In M.W. Klein, J.-J. Kerner, C.L. Maxson, and E.G.M. Weitekamp (Eds.), *The Eurogang Paradox: Street Gangs and Youth Groups in the U.S. and Europe*. Dordrecht, the Netherlands: Kluwer Academic; Amir Rostami, Fredrik Leinfelt, and Stefan Holgersson. (2012). An Exploratory Analysis of Swedish Street Gangs: Applying the Maxson and Klein Typology to a Swedish Gang Dataset. In *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice*, Vol 28(4): 426-445.

4 George W. Knox (2009). *An Introduction to Gangs*. Peotone, IL: New Chicago School Press; Rostami et al., *Applying a Typology*.

drugs, and overall negative attitudes were found to be active across the two groups. However, during the community consultations, when participants were asked to provide a deeper analysis, it was stated that the intent of the actions change over time. The primary example focused on the idea that criminal activities happen in all areas, but it is the intent of the actions that determine if it is street gang involved or something different. To be street involved, the intent of the actions are to benefit the street gang first and the individual second. While lower on the typology, the actions may be more closely connected to issues of survival such as protection from bullies or looking for resources to get food, clothing or shelter. Due to the variance of street gangs and difference of gradual development, the typology is one that focuses both on behavioural and structural frameworks and centre on intent and increased violence and reliance to illegal street economies for status purposes (see Figure 1).

The communities discussed that violence occurs in every space of society, however what differentiates the violence is the intent towards group power and dominance within a specific geographical area. Thus, a group of friends that may engage in fights is not the same as those groups that utilize violence as a means to control territory or use violence to increase their economic capital.

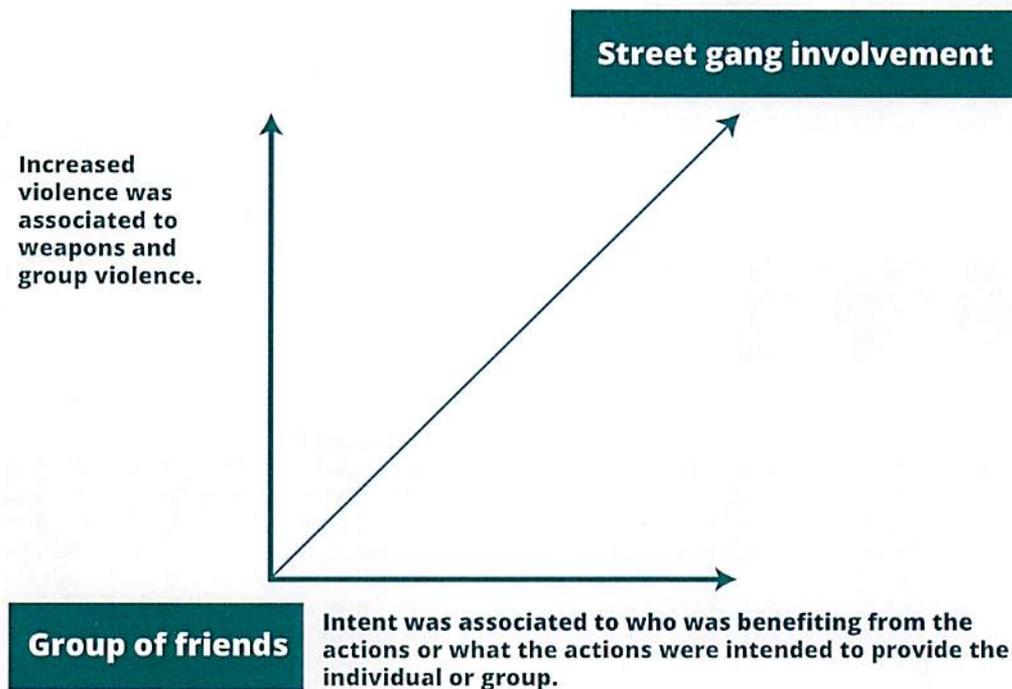


Figure 1

To show the progression through violence and intention, four specific levels of progression was identified through community consultations. Over the course of six community consultations, a street gang typology began to take form. The typology follows both a behavioural and structural framework, which is supported by Andrea Spindler and Martin Bouchard (2011), who examined definitions of street gangs and their usage in Quebec. The progression understood by communities is as follows:

## Level 1

### Pro-Social Group of Friends

#### Behaviours

*At this level, individuals are bonded through common goals and experiences. At this level the group provides a sense of identity, belonging, and connection to community. Individuals are engaged primarily in pro-social activities. It was understood that this group engaged in violence, however violence was sporadic and most often interpersonal between its own members. Individual group members may engage in illegal activities that include alcohol consumption(<19), illegal drug experimentation, and small petty theft.*

*It was noted that sports teams are included at this level, but that due to their structure and use of violence in some communities that they may fit in both Level 1 and Level 2 depending on their behaviours.*

#### Structure

*The groups are loosely structured as leadership is fluid. There are no defined initiation rites for individuals to join. Individuals may dress the same, but the selection of clothing is associated to 'fitting in'; rather than to be identified by other community members. Colors are not a part of dress, but may be dependent on the community, youth and young adults may dress in specific colours as a mode of protection.*

## Level 2

### Bully Groups and Tagging Crews

#### Behaviours

*At level 2, groups continue to provide support, identity, and a sense of belonging. Individuals begin to use violence as a way to increase power over others outside of their group. It was noted that violent behaviours were not just physical but also psychological through intimidation. The outcomes though are damaging to the victims. The intent of violence shifts to group intimidation. Weapons may become more available and readily used; however it was noted that it was group violence that was more prominent at the level such as swarming (larger groups swarming on individuals or smaller groups). Weaponized violence is still minimal, but individuals may begin to carry weapons (knives, spray, etc.) for protection only.*

*There is an increase in substance use at this group with a growing propensity for individuals to begin selling small quantities to support personal drug addictions and for minimal personal economic capital*

#### Structure

*Groups at this level are understood to have more structure and hierarchical values. There is a more defined leadership as well as codes for initiation and conduct for members. Individuals begin to identify more closely to their group ties through identification, and can include the wearing of symbols and clothing, as well as self-identifying to the group as part of their identity.*

*The groups at this level are seen to become identifiable to the broader community through concerted dress or symbols that they use to identify themselves from other groups. For example, tagging crews although may not engage in high levels of violence, use tags as a way to identify from other groups, and the tagging is seen to take the form of vandalism of private property. Therefore, increased community efforts are needed to address damages caused by directed vandalism.*

## Level 3

### Cliques and Wannabes

#### Behaviours

At level 3, these groups are focused on constructing a name for themselves within street spaces. Individuals and groups work to build a reputation or status in relation to local street codes in order to be noticed by street gangs. Individuals at this level become more engaged in violence, with the intent of creating fear and intimidation so as to increase their power becoming more engaged in violence, with the intent focused on fear and intimidation to increase power. Groups are focused on supporting members with a place to belong, sense of identity, economic opportunities and protection from other groups at this level. Individuals are more inclined to be involved in multiple forms of criminal activities which include small break and enters activities, assaults, robberies, theft, and greater involvement in local illegal street economies.

Violence is validated at a group level, as it is used to for the protection of the group's name and to claim territory. Tagging is often used to claim space, but the tags are not used primarily in open street spaces. Individuals become more engaged in understanding and practicing local street codes, inundating themselves more fully into local street literacies and economies. Protection of the group's identity becomes more centralized than in level 2. This level becomes the primary feeder group for street gangs.

There is an increased usage of illegal drugs, but these are controlled due to local street codes. For example, it was noted that for individuals to move to the street gang level they could not be viewed as an individual who is addicted to needles or other 'dirty' drugs because their focus is on the drug and not the gang.

Weaponized violence increases, as weapons are used for illegal activities and a form of intimidation over others. There is an increased tendency to carry firearms or have access to firearms, however knives and other concealable weapons are noted to be more acceptable at this level.

Individuals will become more withdrawn from their community or family, with shifts in attitudes and dress. However, it was noted that if street gang activity is prevalent in the community, the shift in clothing may just be a protection factor or worn to get noticed by the local street gang of the neighbourhood.

#### Structure

Structurally cliques and wannabes are seen to be closely connected to street gangs. There is a greater structured hierarchy of leadership than with level 2 groups, with the primary purpose being to increase the power of the group. Groups are identified by a name, develop their own colours and codes of dress, and often have their own group tag.

It was noted that the majority of groups at this level are formed around deep seeded friendships and familial relationships. Most often the relationships are enhanced through engagement within child welfare, young offender facilities, and adult corrections.

The primary purpose of individuals or groups at this level are to be recognized and acknowledged by a larger more organized street gang. As a result the majority of those involved at this level are youth or young adults.

This level also sees more fluidity than at the street gang level as bonds are not as strong to the group. Due to the fluidity of members, these groups are not as large as established street gangs and most often come and go over time. If they are noticed by a larger street gang, they are often consumed by them, but only those members that are identified by the street gang are seen to be worthy to join.

Illegal activities are conducted with some proceeds coming to the group to support individuals or 'parties'.

## Level 4

### Street Gangs & Hate Groups

#### Behaviours

Level 4 is viewed as where individuals are involved in street gangs. It was noted though that the street gang definition that has been used to identify street gangs (see the National Youth Gang Survey definition that is most commonly used – Chettleburgh, 2007) is inadequate as it excludes particular groups that promote hate and focus on increased violence against peoples in a community. Thus, the inclusion of hate groups (Aryan Nations, Soldiers of Odin, etc.) into the term street gang is necessary, as their behaviours and activities are violent and most often engaged in illegal street activities.

Behaviours at this level focus on increased violence through fear and intimidation to control territory and local street economies. They are identifiable through colours, tags, clothing, and specific ways of movement moving one's body. They are knowledgeable in local street codes and street literacies.

There is an increased focus on identifying as a member of the group and less about personal identity. The group becomes central as one's daily life is on the maintenance of or improving the status of the group within their community.

Violence is more structured than at level 3, but the violence is more intense. Weaponized violence becomes normalized with increased use of firearms generally against rivals. Individuals and groups are targeted for specific reasons, but primarily they challenge the group in some form (i.e. new immigrants and people of colour targeted by hate groups). The violence creates a need for these groups to band together for protection, thus increasing the chance of moving up the typology and the creation of new ethnic street gangs).

Addictions at this level include heightened behavioural and substance addictions. Behavioural addiction is connected to power, respect, and status and gained through violence. Substance addiction increases at this level for some as they are looking to suppress psychological and physical trauma associated to violence that they have engaged in to increase their power and status within local spaces.

There are specific codes for dress, as certain colours and brands of clothing are worn to differentiate from other groups, but still maintain hidden from those not knowledgeable of local street codes.

#### Structure

There is a defined hierarchy with leadership and activities defined by the group. Individuals have specific 'jobs' at this level and their allegiance to the street gang is predicated on doing their job. Most street gangs have an inner circle that provides the guidance for the street gang and is involved in local street politics.

There are defined initiation rites of passage connected to correctional institutions. Most rely on violent entries to gain membership such as 'minutes' with specific tasks also associated to prove one's loyalty and commitment to the street gang. Local street codes are used as a way to promote street justice, as groups are more connected to illegal street economies.

Most street gangs are connected to larger more organized international crime syndicates and are the street level drug dealers and distributors. They use their connections and knowledge of the community to increase their economic capital.



It was acknowledged that with increased violence, there is an exposure to traumatic experiences. Traumatic experiences are associated to psychological, spiritual, physical, and emotional violence that alters one's ability to lead a healthy life. As individuals become more engaged in violent street spaces, they face increased traumatic experiences. However, because the street space is a space that embraces hyper or toxic masculinity— a specific performance that validates domination and violence over others who may challenge one's status— individuals are left with minimal opportunities to address trauma other than to increase one's substance abuse. Although individuals may gain power, respect and money as they move up the typology— which are forms of behavioural addiction— the psychological impact results in increased issues of substance use. However, specific illegal drugs are promoted within local street codes, but most individuals search out other 'dirty' drugs to mask the pain and reality that individuals find themselves in over time. It is through the increased usage of 'dirty' drugs that individuals are removed from the street gang, most often in a violent manner, and are then left to try and survive without the support of their group.

Communities explained that violence, addictions, and trauma are intertwined and increase as one becomes more engrained in a violent street lifestyle. The histories and experiences that have shaped the pathways of individuals to join a street gang though are complex and must be acknowledged for an effective street gang strategy to take place. It is because of such complexities that the communities expressed the need for a community health approach to frame a provincial prevention and intervention street gang strategy.

## Recommendations for the Development of the Saskatchewan Prevention/Intervention Street Gang Strategy – Building Healthier Communities

Over the course of collecting information to frame the recommendations for a provincial wide street gang strategy for Saskatchewan, communities and individuals expressed that there is a definite desire for such a strategy. Through a community-engaged approach, utilizing three different modes of data collections (surveys, a forum, and community consultations) nearly 700 Saskatchewan residents had the opportunity to express their voices and perceptions on how to best address the complexities associated to street gangs. Compiling the information from the multiple modes within a grounded theory approach. Grounded theory is a qualitative data analysis method that allows one to sift through large amounts of data in order to develop a thematic map of the subject under study.<sup>5</sup> For this report, five broad themes were identified with 24 recommendations to be considered in the development of a provincial street gang strategy. The themes and recommendations are as follows:

### Theme 1 – Development of Infrastructure and Leadership

Communities expressed a need for a centralized leadership organization, that has the ability and capacity to bring together various stakeholders in the province. A Strategy Development Committee (herein SDC) was seen to be vital to the development, implementation and uptake of the SPISGS. Communities consulted were emphatic that the focus of the provincial street gang strategy be on prevention and intervention, not suppression. Community consultations found that they were apprehensive of police (RCMP or City Police) or the Department of Corrections and Policing as leads for the strategy. Most communities expressed that policing and corrections need to be partners within the larger oversight committee, but that their role is to support and advocate for community-led prevention and intervention strategies.<sup>6</sup> Communities expressed that the strategy focus on mental health to address trauma and addictions as these were viewed as the greatest precursors for individuals to join a street gang.

<sup>5</sup> Charmaz, Kathy. *Constructing Grounded Theory*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2006.

<sup>6</sup> It must be noted that at one community consultation event, those present discussed that they did not feel Police and Corrections have any presence on the Strategy Development Committee because of the poor relationships that these agencies have within the specific communities. However, other consultations expressed that Policing and Corrections be involved because partnerships need to be created, and that the SDC could begin to bridge this relationship.

Most community consultation sessions explained that there is an urgent need for grassroots or community-based agencies to be included in the leadership group. It was noted that many initiatives are forced onto communities with little thought or knowledge to the specific community contexts that may be in place. Communities expressed that although programs may be effective in a particular community, due to the specific social conditions, programs may need to be modified slightly or dramatically in order for success to occur in their particular community. Therefore, funding that is focused on 'metrics of success' needs to be done in consultation with communities for each project in order to reach the most at-risk.

To lead the strategy, community consultations and forum discussions stated that a 'champion' should be targeted to lead the SPISGS forward. It was discussed that STR8 UP, because of its history and knowledge of intervention strategies be the leaders of the SPISGS. The reasons for this are that STR8 UP has 1) access to individuals looking to exit street gangs and this knowledge will help to support the strategy moving forward; 2) has connections across the province through members and therefore can support community led initiatives; and 3) has the ability, with support, to provide educational training to communities through their community presentations.

## Recommendations

- Develop a strategic committee that is inclusive of the various partners and representation from STR8 UP, Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations, Métis Nation of Saskatchewan, youth advisory positions, mental health, police and corrections, probation, non-profit/grassroots organizations, regional representation, child welfare, social services, people with lived experiences etc. It is recommended that the province look to the community-based model formed with the Gang Action Interagency Network (GAIN)<sup>7</sup> in Winnipeg as an example that can be adapted for Saskatchewan, and that those who sit on the strategy be compensated if they are not already by their organization. For example, it was expressed that individuals with lived experiences will provide invaluable information, however they are expected to

be there on their own time while others are paid to be there for their employment. Therefore, a method of payment should be provided to pay for the time of individuals with lived experiences;

- That a centralized location and entity be created or appointed as the leader of the prevention and intervention strategy and that it be funded and supported so that communities can contact it for information and resource support. It was expressed that STR8 UP should be the leader of the SPISGS;
- That the SPISGS and the Government of Saskatchewan look to the adaptability and adoption of grassroots, relentless programming that targets those viewed as highest risk to street gang involvement and those looking to exit street gangs. STR8 UP and Homeboy Industries (Los Angeles, California) were highlighted due to their community-based/engaged focus on the hardest to reach. Many communities expressed that they would like to see STR8 UP support programming expanded into their communities.

## Theme 2 – Addressing Trauma, Colonization, and Settler Colonialism

Trauma is understood to be one of the leading causes for individuals to become involved in a street gang. Trauma though must not be understood as a static defining point that can be medicalized or reported on an assessment tool. Saskatchewan has a longstanding history of colonization and settler colonialism that continues to impact the relationships of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.<sup>8</sup> The impacts of colonization and settler colonialism cannot be easily quantified within trauma assessment tools for individuals and it is this history that also places Indigenous peoples at greater risk to be labeled as potential street gang members or criminals because of their Indigeneity. The complexities of such histories are found in the overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples across the province as they are more readily removed from families and communities, disrupting identity and community well-being. In Saskatchewan, Indigenous children and youth are vastly overrepresented in child welfare settings and young offender facilities.<sup>9</sup> High involvement in both systems are proven to show an increased propensity for

7 GAIN, Gang Action Interagency Network. 2018. Bridging the Gaps: Solution to Winnipeg Gangs.

8 James Daschuck, J. (2014) *Clearing the Plains: Disease, Politics of Starvation, and the Loss of Aboriginal Life*. Regina, SK: University of Regina Press.

9 Cindy Blackstock, and Nico Trocmé, "Community-Based Child Welfare for Aboriginal Children: Supporting Resilience Through Structural Change," *Social Policy Journal of New Zealand* 24, no. 12 (2005): 12-33; Barbara Fallon, Martin Chabot, John Fluke, Cindy Blackstock, Bruce MacLaurin, and Lil Tonmyr, "Placement: Decisions and Disparities Among Aboriginal Children: Further Analysis of the Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect Part A: Comparisons of the 1998 and 2003 Surveys." *Child abuse & neglect* 37, no. 1 (2013): 47-60.

10 Henry, *Indigenous Lens*

individuals to be involved in adult corrections, both provincial and federal.<sup>10</sup>

Indian residential school era and the subsequent Adopt Indian and Métis policies of the 1960s and 70s has created cycles of intergenerational trauma that today's youth continue to carry forth, at times in violent ways either onto themselves (suicide and addictions) and others (assaults). The removal and demonizing of Indigenous cultural identity continues to be a focal point for communities to attempt to address these pasts. However, communities also noted that this history is not something that should be focused specifically as an Indigenous issues, but that non- Indigenous communities and peoples must understand how they are implicated within these histories as well.

The focus though expressed by communities is that trauma is not just an Indigenous issue, and that many families and individuals face trauma. Communities expressed that if relevant prevention and intervention strategies to be implemented, addressing trauma and addictions must be central. Despite this, communities have expressed concerns that there is limited access to addictions and mental health services in their communities. This has resulted in communities searching for innovative ways to support families and individuals.

### Recommendations

- Increase and improve support services, specifically in northern and rural communities where access to mental health services are limited. Indigenous communities expressed the need to control mental health services where traditional mental health practices are validated and supported financially in relation to western mental health services;
- With the closing of public transportation services, that the SPISGS strategy and the provincial government look to focus on providing alternative ways for individuals to travel from their communities to larger centres where mental health and addictions services are more readily available. The closing of the public transportation also has impacts that will be related to justice with individuals looking to escape violence within their community, as well as visit members of their family who may be incarcerated;
- Improve services and approaches within correctional

centres and upon release back into the community. There is a lack of communication between corrections and community organizations supporting individuals upon release and there needs to be stronger communication and organization in order to implement healthy reintegration programming. For example, it was stated at the Public Forum that STR8 UP has tried to work with corrections to develop exit plans, but there has been resistance to the sharing of one's exit plan, resulting in the duplication as well as lack of community services;

- The need for intervention programming to focus on where people are at and not use an individual's trauma against them, i.e. documenting traumatic experiences as a risk factor;
- To build and support culturally relevant programs. Communities expressed that they do not want to be told what program to implement (i.e. gold star programs developed in other provinces or countries), but want to work with the Province and the Strategy to develop programming that is relevant to the intergenerational traumas that continue to impact health and well-being, and have led to the increase of violence and addictions;
- More training and education on trauma-informed care that is also culturally relevant. It is recommended that all peoples who work in Saskatchewan, following recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC)<sup>11</sup>, come to understand the history and legacy of Indian Residential Schools and how this history continues to impact Indigenous communities and relationships with non-Indigenous peoples.

### Theme 3 – Knowledge Translation and Mobilization

During our consultations with communities and agencies across the province, we heard that there is a general lack of knowledge about street gangs. Communities understand that there is a need for police and justice agencies to work in secrecy with ongoing criminal investigations; however they felt that there is little general or non-identified information that is shared so as to evaluate issues pertaining to street gangs specific to Saskatchewan. Communities could identify those street gangs that have had a larger media presence, but lacked knowledge of what to look for; how groups differ from street gangs; the

<sup>11</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC). "Canada, Aboriginal Peoples, and Residential Schools: They Came for the Children." [www.myrobust.com/websites/trcinstitution/File/2039\\_T&R\\_eng\\_web\[1\].pdf](http://www.myrobust.com/websites/trcinstitution/File/2039_T&R_eng_web[1].pdf)

various activities; or the total number of street members or gangs active in their community or the province.

Communities also expressed that they are unaware of how to deal with issues of street gangs as there is limited information specifically for street gangs in Saskatchewan. Although it was noted that there are a handful of reports and some research, this information is not readily available for communities, their members, or agencies that work directly with those identified as 'high-risk', much of the information is secondary stemming from individuals talking with those involved, or assumed to be involved, and that this information is rarely collected or collated for future use.

Communities expressed the importance of developing knowledge translation technologies or educational tools such as pamphlets or DVDs that are relevant and accessible to a multitude of learners and age ranges. Communities found that presentations, such as those provided by STR8 UP, with individuals who have been directly involved in the street gang lifestyle is important but more information is needed to assist those who may not be involved. Communities asked for more information about the impacts of street gangs and programs of excellence that may be accessed and adapted to local community contexts be made accessible for help and support.

Finally, communities expressed the need and importance of materials that are culturally relevant to First Nations and Métis peoples, specifically, that materials related to female involvement be created. This information is not only important for Indigenous communities, but all Saskatchewan communities that are looking to address racism and stereotypes directed towards Indigenous peoples.

## Recommendations

- It is recommended that the SPISGS create a reliable way to assess, determine, and provide information to the broader community about the realities of individuals involved in street gangs. Communities expressed that they are also worried that this database may be used to further criminalize Indigenous youth as they will be targeted if street gang numbers become a political tool to gain access to funding. Despite this, communities stated that they need to know what is really happening in their community. It is recommended that the street gang

typology created for this report be used to assess these numbers;

- Related to theme 1, communities expressed that there needs to be a way to bring together key stakeholders to address street gangs with the ability to evaluate its effectiveness in a non-biased way. Therefore, research and data collection tools need to be created to provide the proper metrics of success, but these must be created in partnership with communities to incorporate community histories and legacies that have led to street gang development;

- Information be created and offered to communities to help better comprehend street gangs, local and provincial street gang exit programs, and specific supports for individuals moving to a new community;

- The SPISGS, once it is created, be funded to create knowledge sharing tools and that there be at minimum bi-annual reports on the progress of the strategy and issues that other communities may be facing;

- It is recommended that an annual conference be held bringing together stakeholders across the province to talk about success stories and issues related to their communities. Experts, specifically those that are not solely focused on policing or criminal justice, should be encouraged to attend as guests and invited speakers;

- It was stated that communities would like to have more information and education in relation to toxic or hyper-masculinity and its connections to street gangs and street lifestyles. Community consultations discussed how violent masculinity seems to be the primary entry pathway for street gang involvement, for all genders.

## Theme 4 - Addressing Systemic Oppression and Structural Issues of Poverty and Homelessness

Throughout all four methods of data collection and analysis, issues related to broader themes of systemic oppression and structural issues were raised as primary concerns. Saskatchewan has a long standing history of deep-seeded racism that has negatively impacted relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. The numbers, as stated in the literature review (see Appendix B), continue to

show an overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples in criminal justice and child welfare statistics, as well as poorer overall health and mental health. The history of colonization and present day settler colonialism continues the apprehension and separation of children. Forum and community discussions stated that there is a need for prevention and intervention programs to address and support familial units.

Economic security and housing were viewed as two primary barriers for street gang involvement. Individuals who do not have access to legitimate economic capital will search out other avenues in order to support themselves or their families. Due to the availability and need of the underground economy, individuals slowly learn local street codes and it is during this interaction to escape poverty that some individuals look to street gangs as a viable option to survive. It must also be noted that the majority of individuals who live in poverty do not commit crimes, nor do they become involved in street gangs<sup>12</sup>, and that individuals who become involved in street gangs come from all economic spaces. Research has shown that as individuals become more engaged in a street lifestyle, masculinity becomes a factor in how individuals reengage or embrace violence as a way to build status and reputations.<sup>13</sup>

Communities expressed that they lack services to support individuals who are exiting correctional institutions, and that it is because of this that they go back to their previous relationships, even though they are looking to exit street gangs. The result becomes a revolving door into corrections, as individuals are unable to maintain stability as they are searching for ways to access monies and places to live. Along with a lack of services, it was expressed that there are limited employment opportunities for individuals who are exiting corrections or street gangs. Due to their records, individuals may be denied work, thus forcing them to reenter illegal street economies. Therefore, policies that look to limit the ability of individuals searching for work should be addressed in order to allow them to move forward in building healthier lives for themselves and the broader community.

### **Recommendations**

- It is recommended that the province implement anti-racist training for justice, health, education and human service providers across the province. Such

training is seen as an important step to build relationships across Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities and a step in rebuilding reconciliation. The training should not be focused on cultural training or multiculturalism, but focus on the need to deconstruct power relations and how colonization/settler colonialism continues to marginalize Indigenous peoples specifically in Saskatchewan. It is recommended to work with anti-racist scholars such as Drs. Verna St. Denis, Sheelah MacLean, and Alex Wilson to develop this training;

- To combat poverty and homelessness in the province, it is recommended that the broader business community have the opportunity to strengthen work opportunities with individuals exiting correctional institutions. Studies continue to show that Indigenous and peoples of colour are routinely overlooked in hiring practices and therefore are at heightened risks to engage in illegal street economies to provide for their families. Because of this, the broader business community needs to have training to break down barriers and build relationships to increase economic opportunities;

- The province look to provide funding to support additional community holistic training residences where mental health and job training services be provided, and individuals service plans be designed to support transition to sustainable living;

- It is recommended that the province invest in job training and hiring practices, specifically for those who are incarcerated. It is hoped that this extends beyond skill training opportunities, rather individuals have opportunities to partake in other aspects of adult education. It is recommended that scholarships and bursaries be created for individuals who are exiting corrections, and if they are in place that they are promoted;

- That education programs be created to address hyper and toxic masculinity. The development of the typology has shown that to address violence in Saskatchewan, communities and aspects of masculinity need to be addressed. Therefore, programming to support healthy masculinity is needed to prevent individuals progress through the typology.

<sup>12</sup> Refer to literature review

<sup>13</sup> Anderson, Elijah. *Code of the Street: Decency, Violence, and the Moral of Life of the Inner City*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1999; Bourgois, Philippe. *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*, Second Edition. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009; Garot, Robert. *Who You Claim?: Performing Gang Identity in School and on the Streets*. New York: NYU Press, 2010; Henry. *Through an Indigenous Lens*.

## Theme 5 – Institutional Supports

In order for any initiative to be successful, there must be institutional support, and for the full development of the Saskatchewan Street Gang Strategy, government support is needed to build healthier communities. Community consultations expressed concern that recent policy shifts have limited their ability to address local issues that they feel lead to street gang involvement. During community consultations, we repeatedly heard criticism of government human service agency providers where staff are locked into the parameters of their job and do not have the mandate to work with individuals where they are at. Service providers who were in attendance expressed frustration because of limited options or options that were being driven through a top down approach.

The shift to community-engaged practices looks to address the problems with silos or top down approach that has traditionally been practiced by government ministries and services. This is an ideological shift where humility and relationship building becomes the focus. Community consultations found that a focus on community-engaged approaches had the potential for stronger community buy-in and the effective development of government funded, community- led programs. Community consultations continued to state that it is those who are living in the community know what is happening, and that for the Saskatchewan Street Gang Strategy to be effective community engaged practices must be undertaken.

### Recommendations

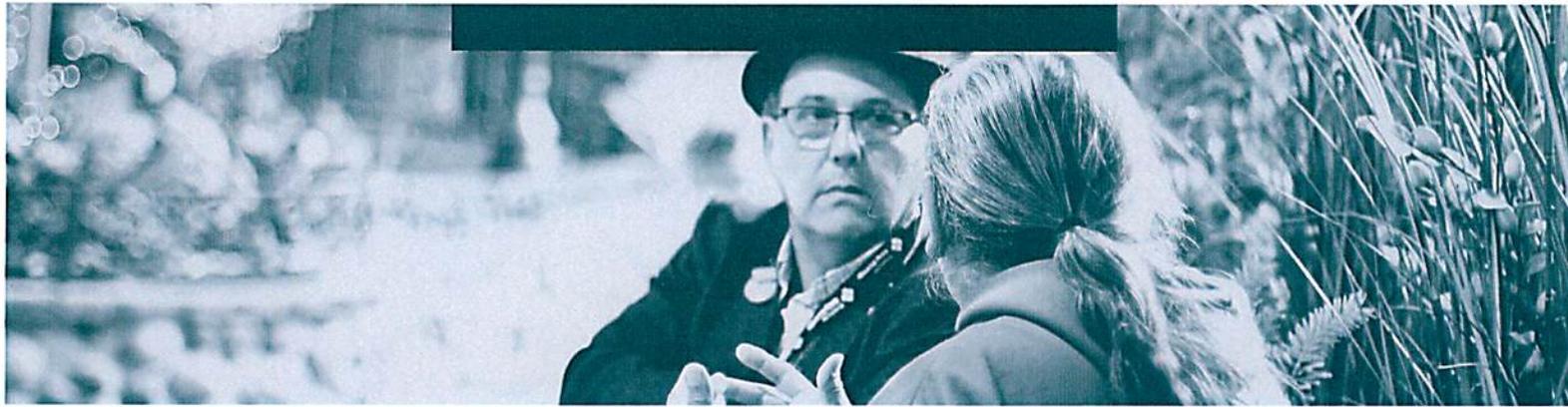
- The Province of Saskatchewan should provide essential, timely, and adequate funding that can be rolled into long-term project funding if effective. Community consultations expressed that this funding should only be accessible to those outside of Policing and Corrections. Rather than taking the lead in such initiatives, Policing and Corrections should be consulted as partners to access these funds;
- Although the HUB model has been presented to communities as the standard of organization, communities expressed that to develop the Saskatchewan Street Gang Strategy a different approach is needed, one that is not as top down or controlled by Policing and Corrections;

- That funding be made available to agencies and communities looking to work in prevention and intervention at a grassroots level. Communities expressed that they know the importance of metrics to prove program success, but that the indicators must be relevant to both the program and the realities of the community. Therefore, adequate data collection tools must be created that are localized but hold community accountable for change;

- A fund should be created that can be readily accessible for communities that may be experiencing a phenomenon. This fund is to be made available for communities who are experiencing a heightened level of violence, addictions, or trauma in order to prevent or intervene within the typology so that violence is reduced. This funding can be made to cover short timeframes and should be separate from long-term funding of specific programs.

## Priorities and Next Steps

The development of a provincial prevention and intervention street gang strategy is an important step for the Province of Saskatchewan to undertake, and one that is long overdue. As street gangs have slowly found their way across the province, both in urban and rural communities, little has been done collaboratively to address the issues as a province. Different communities have worked diligently to address growing concerns, but without a concerted provincial strategy, many of the issues find their way into other communities, or the issues shift into something different. It is because of this that communities, agencies, and government must work together to limit potential pathways of individuals to become entrenched in a street gang lifestyle. However, due to the complexities of issues, a singular provincial approach that is the same for every community is ill advised and will be ineffective. This is because every community is different with different histories and social realities. Therefore, the development of the SPISGS must be broad enough for the variability of its communities. For the development of the SPISGS to be effective, it is recommended that three priorities be undertaken immediately.



First, because the issues of street gangs is not one that will wait for a strategy to be created and implemented, the Province of Saskatchewan must provide, find ways to support, and advocate for adequate and core-funding to support a leader in the province to fully develop and implement the provincial strategy. The community forum, consultations, and quantitative tool expressed that the most logical entity to take this on would be STR8 UP. STR8 UP has a history of building relationships in and across communities, as well as within agencies and is seen as a leader provincially and nationally in street gang intervention programming. It is their commitment and desire for change that has motivated communities to come together and partake in this work and it is their desire to continue to move forward that is necessary to develop the SPISGS. STR8 UP also provides educational opportunities for communities through their community outreach and has developed a model of change for individuals looking to exit the street gang lifestyle.

Secondly, the province must provide adequate support to develop a community-engaged strategic approach. This funding should be a minimum of two years to develop a strategic plan and a logic model to evaluate the strategy moving forward. This needs to be done with community and designated leaders who are understood as knowledge or experts in their field. Stemming from the first priority, STR8 UP should be the host agency of the strategy as they can become the contact point for communities looking for information, but also the point of contact to share information back to communities. This work should also include the development of educational tools so that there is a minimal gap from the collection of data for this report to the development of the strategic plan.

Thirdly, the Province of Saskatchewan, in partnership with STR8 UP, should share the recommendations to develop a provincial street gang strategy broadly with participating communities and other interested parties. This will include a media release as well as a

conference in the new year bringing back key stakeholders to begin to shape the strategy moving forward. This event should become an annual conference to bring together communities, researchers, policy-analysts, and those with lived experiences to learn from one another to move forward together. A youth conference should also be held in partnership with this, as it is youth voices that need to be heard and acknowledged, for it is them that many of the programs and strategies will be targeting. If they are not included throughout in a meaningful way, then it will be difficult for any strategy to actually engage those who may most need the support.

## Conclusion

Street gangs have created an unease and sense of fear within and across Saskatchewan communities. There is no easy or quick fix to address the issues that have helped to shape the socio-political histories that give rise to street gangs. Meaningful partnerships that look to address systemic issues which have led to the growth and proliferation of street gangs throughout the province are needed to develop an effective prevention and intervention strategy. Criminal justice and suppression approaches, although continuously funded to address and lead initiatives, are ill-equipped to address the systemic issues of poverty, racism, and violence, that lead to homelessness, increased addictions, and subsequent trauma that are seen to lead to street gang involvement. Therefore, Saskatchewan must look to a culturally relevant approach that focuses on building healthier communities if an effective prevention and intervention street gang strategy is to be created. This will require a lot of time for individuals to rethink the spaces of street gangs and to understand the complexities that have led some individuals to join. It will take time, effort, and resources, but if the goal is to build a healthier province then it is a path that must be taken.

