

Pohna: Keepers of the Fire

**Gang Intervention and
Diversion Program**

Background

- Chief Mike Boyd of EPS invited Community Solution to Gang Violence (CSGV) to a meeting of the Community Safety Leadership Council to help create a new initiative to deal with youth involved in criminal and gang related activity.
- In response CSGV drew a number of community partners together to design a Gang Intervention and Diversion Program, this is now known as Pohna: Keepers of the Fire.

Collaborative Partnership

- NCSA is the host agency and manages the day to day operation of the program
- Partners supporting the program include: Edmonton Police Service, Edmonton Young Offenders Centre, Edmonton Youth Attendance Centre, Alberta Children and Youth Services, Crown Prosecutors Office, Youth Criminal Defence Office, Edmonton Public Schools, Edmonton Catholic Schools, City of Edmonton, Community Solution to Gang Violence.

Program Goals

- Prevent recruitment of youth into the street gangs/organized criminal networks.
- Redirect youth involved in criminal and gang activity and entrenchment in the gang lifestyle.

General Approach

- Youth and families voluntarily commit to participate in the program
- Youth are the core drivers of the program
- Draws on Cree cultural teachings
- “Wraps” an array of individualized services and support networks around the youth (Circles of Support)

Referral Criteria

- Youth between the ages of 11-17, living in the City of Edmonton
- Voluntarily commit to participate in the program
- Preference will be given to Aboriginal youth
- Some indication of risk for gang involvement/association/connection

Family/Parenting

- Inadequate supervision
- History of family violence
- Parental substance abuse
- Family member or significant other involved or associated with gangs

Education/Employment

- School truancy
- Suspended from school
- Expelled from school
- Problems with persons in authority
- Unemployed/not seeking employment

Peer Relations

- Hangs out with peers associated or involved with gang members
- Hangs out with delinquent acquaintances or friends
- Friends or associates involved in alcohol and/or drug use

Activities/Gang Involvement

- Spends considerable time hanging out with peers in malls/LRT/street
- On fringes of gang involvement
- Involved in gang related activity (swarming, vandalism, theft, drugs)
- Self identifies as a gang member

Prior and Current Offenses/Dispositions

- Previous criminal charges
- Current criminal charges
- On probation
- Prior probation
- Prior detention

Referral Process

- Referrals are sent to Pohna: Keepers of the Fire, and reviewed by Program Manager
- It is then assigned to a Youth Support Coordinator
- The Referral Agent and Youth Support Coordinator arrange a meeting with youth and family to provide an overview of program and its fit with the youth

Intake and Screening Process:

- Explain nature of the program to youth and family
- Determine readiness, suitability and ability to participate in program
- Develop a safety plan (issues and supports)
- Obtain Informed Consent to contact and share information with others

Assessment Process

- Understanding of the risk and protective factors in the lives of youth
- Identify strengths of youth and their family
- Identify the connections and supports surrounding youth (both formal and informal)
- Identify the goals and needs that are important to youth and their families

Circles of Support

- Planning (Hopes, Fears, Strengths , Commitment)
- Success (Growth, Strengths, Potential, Commitment)

Youth Driven Support Plan

- Goals they want to work towards
- What they will do
- Who can help and what they will do to support youth's plan

Implementation and Tracking of Support Plan

- Youth Support Coordinator maintains regular contact with youth and family and with members of Circle of Support to support implementation of plan
- Circle of Support will meet to adjust plans and celebrate successes as plan unfolds

Transition Plan

- Ensure there is a purposeful transition out of the program and strategy for maintaining the positive outcomes they achieved in the program
- Continue the journey forward without formal involvement in the program