

CPO BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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OTTAWA STREET VIOLENCE & GANG STRATEGY

2017-2020

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OTTAWA STREET VIOLENCE & GANG STRATEGY

2017-2020

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This document quickly reviews the approach and work of the Ottawa Gang Strategy from 2007-2016, and highlights what the Ottawa Street Violence & Gang Strategy will focus on moving forward into 2017-2020. The change in name of the Strategy, as well as the areas the Strategy will focus on moving forward, are based on the results of a number of consultations in Ottawa on where to go next. These are discussed in the following sections.

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1. WHAT IS THE OTTAWA GANG STRATEGY?

Since 2006, community partners have been working together to address a growing concern around what can be described as gang activity and the harmful effects of street-level violence in Ottawa. From its early years under the Ottawa Youth Gang Prevention Initiative (OYGPI, 2007-2012), to the first articulation of the Ottawa Gang Strategy in 2013 (2013-2016), community partners have been working under a Holistic Approach. This Holistic Approach takes into consideration the many factors that contribute to gang involvement and street-level violence at the individual, family, peer, school, neighbourhood, and social levels. It is based on the social science literature that highlights good practices in addressing violence, and on the lived experiences of our communities.

FOUR PILLARS OF THE STRATEGY

Through its holistic lens, four pillars are used to drive change simultaneously.

Pillar	Description
Neighbourhood Cohesion	Building positive relationships in neighbourhoods affected by gang activity and street-level violence to reduce fear, strengthen relationships, increase positive social interaction, and increase community capacity to address unacceptable activities.
Prevention	Taking an inclusive approach to predict, identify, prevent and reduce violence and victimization. Addressing risk factors associated with violence and victimization and increasing protective factors that can help guard against them. Refers specifically to initiatives that positively engage young people with their families, schools, and communities before they become involved in gang-related activities and violence.
Intervention	Engaging youth and adults who are involved or beginning to be involved in gang activity and street-level violence. This includes supports and resources for youth and adults in correctional institutions and for individuals under court-order conditions.
Enforcement & Suppression	Enforcing laws through targeted and sustained policing of criminal gang activity, prosecution, sentencing, incarceration, and court-ordered community supervision after release.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF THE STRATEGY

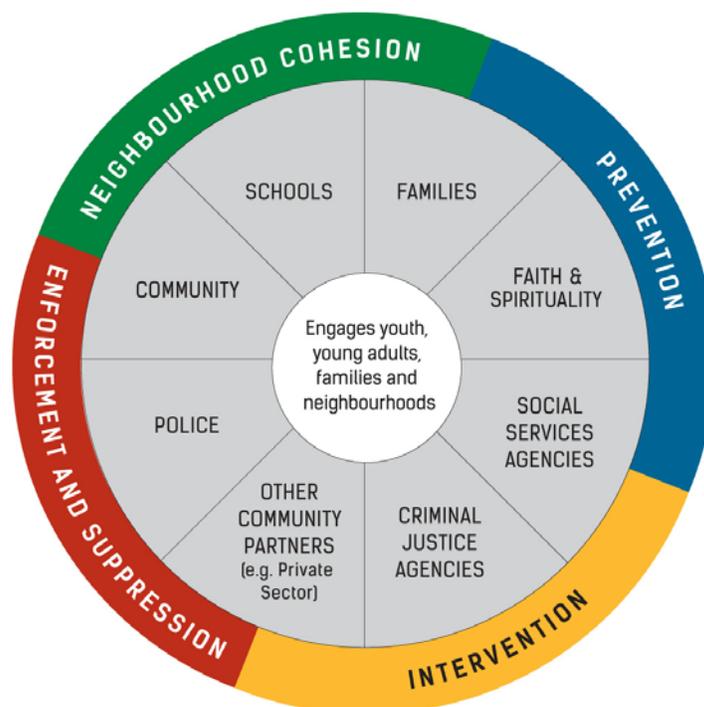
The Strategy is also based on a set of guiding principles intended to support initiatives and actions aimed at addressing gang activity and street-level violence in Ottawa.

Principle	Description
Community-based	Recognize the uniqueness of communities and foster engagement in culturally responsive ways to develop and deliver grassroots, community-led solutions.
Youth centered	Driven by the needs of children and youth and their families.
Youth engagement	Give youth the opportunity to provide their perspectives on the issues that affect them, and empower them to take a leadership role in shaping initiatives that best meet their needs.
Family engagement	Work in partnership with families to identify and address the needs of children and youth who are at-risk of involvement in gang activity and violence or who seek to exit this path.
Evidence-based and results-focused	Identify and leverage proven initiatives and successful efforts to encourage similar initiatives adapted to other communities and needs. Initiatives undertaken by partners should be evaluated for their impact.

Collaboration & information sharing	Foster trust, collective effort, and multi-disciplinary collaboration through partnerships among community, police, all orders of government, and agencies where results are far greater than any one organization could provide independently. A coordinated and horizontally integrated approach is required to address the multiple issues related to community safety (mental health, addictions, child welfare, interpersonal violence, violence against women and girls). Foster an openness to lawful and appropriate sharing of information between individuals and organizations in a timely and accurate manner.
Increased investment in prevention	Advocate for additional resources for proactive evidence-informed measures.

A HOLISTIC APPROACH

The four pillars and guiding principles above form the holistic framework of the Strategy.



2. WHAT THE OTTAWA GANG STRATEGY ACCOMPLISHED IN 2013-2016

From 2013-2016, community partners involved in the Ottawa Gang Strategy worked together to develop and implement several initiatives that seek to address the issues of gang activity and street-level violence in Ottawa communities. The table below outlines the projects undertaken under the umbrella of the Ottawa Gang Strategy, and the organizations that assumed the lead responsibilities for each project.

Ottawa Gang Strategy Projects 2013-2016

Key initiatives carried out in 2013-2016 under the four pillars of the Strategy are listed below.

		Projects	Lead Organizations
1	Neighbourhood Cohesion	Bridging the gap between immigrant communities and the criminal justice system	Community Leadership Network for Families, LASI WorldSkills, Somali Family Services
2		Post-Incident Neighbourhood Support Protocol <i>- Responding appropriately to traumatic events</i>	Rideau-Rockcliffe Community Resource Centre and the Coalition of Community Health and Resource Centres
3		United Neighbours, Levers of Change (UNLOC) <i>- Strengthening partnerships between residents and community agencies to address safety priorities</i>	Pinecrest-Queensway Community Health Centre
4	Prevention	Real Talk: Building positive youth-police relationships in four neighbourhoods	Ontario Justice Education Network (OJEN)
5		Enhanced Risk-Identification Tool <i>- Identifying youth at-risk before they join gangs</i>	Ottawa Police Service
6		Supporting Families: Siblings At-Risk <i>- engaging with families of gang members and their younger siblings</i>	Youturn, John Howard Society of Ottawa
7		YOW (Youth Outreach Worker) Program Ottawa <i>- bridging the gap between youth and the services they require</i>	The Boys and Girls Club of Ottawa
8		You Decide – Youth Employment	City of Ottawa
9		Shared Training Events	Crime Prevention Ottawa, Youth Services Bureau
10		Time for Change <i>- long term intensive case management for those most affected by gang/drug life</i>	John Howard Society of Ottawa, OCISO, Youturn, Ottawa Police Service, Crime Prevention Ottawa
11	Intervention	Ottawa Community Youth Diversion Program <i>- improve our approach to dealing with youth in conflict with the law</i>	The Boys and Girls Club of Ottawa
12		Provincial Asset Mapping of Services for Youth Involved in Gang Activity	Youth Services Bureau. University of Ottawa
13		Enforcement and Suppression efforts	Ottawa Police Service

Ottawa Gang Strategy Progress 2013-2016

In late 2016, an [evaluation of the first three years of the Ottawa Gang Strategy](#) found that it contributed to several positive outcomes in both the short-term and medium-term.

Short-Term Progress

- Increased awareness of services
- Improved service delivery to children, youth and families
- Better awareness and integration of community services
- New and improved partnerships between community and organizations
- Positively engaged young people, families, schools and communities

Medium-Term Progress

- Increased access to services
- Enhanced cross-agency collaboration and service coordination
- Improved service delivery to children, youth and families
- Sustained community partnerships
- Prevented individuals from entering gang life by addressing risk factors
- Prosecuted and convicted gang members

3. WHAT WE HEARD IN 2017

Following the first three years of the Ottawa Gang Strategy and its evaluation in late 2016, the Strategy's Steering Committee wanted to ensure that it was responsive to the shifting realities of our streets and communities in Ottawa. A series of consultations were conducted mostly in May to August of 2017 to support the refreshing of the Ottawa Gang Strategy moving forward. This included the activities below to seek ideas and input from residents and service providers alike.

CONSULTATION ACTIVITIES TO SEEK IDEAS & INPUT INTO THE REFRESHED STRATEGY

- 1) Conducting an **online survey** to consult Ottawa community members and service providers broadly (January to July 2017; 104 respondents).
- 2) Gathering and reviewing **existing community surveys, needs assessments and reports** from Ottawa service providers from the past 3 years (2014-2017; 7 reports).
- 3) Hosting three **focus groups**, 2 with adults and 1 with youth with lived experience in affected neighbourhoods (June-August; 21 participants).
- 4) Conducting one-on-one **interviews** with young and older adults with lived experience of and involvement in street violence and/or gang activity (June-July; 22 respondents).
- 5) Hosting a **public consultation** with facilitated small group discussions (held on June 28; over 70 participants).
- 6) Facilitating **discussions with the Ottawa Gang Strategy Steering Committee** of partners.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS FROM CONSULTATIONS

Overall, the following conclusions can be drawn from the consultations conducted as part of the refreshing of the Ottawa Gang Strategy:

- **Loose organization of those involved in street-level and gang violence in Ottawa:** Partners involved in the Ottawa Gang Strategy Steering Committee have observed that ‘gangs’ in Ottawa are not particularly organized. In other words, rather than the result of well organized gangs focused on loyalty and turf, incidents of serious street level violence appear to be the result of conflicts among individuals. There is a sense that individuals are capitalizing on opportunities to make money and are advancing their own interests through loose affiliations and associations with others, and quickly reacting to conflicts, rather than the more traditional, hierarchical and well organized criminal gangs.
- **Residents are most concerned with the daily, unaddressed ‘low level’ violence in their neighbourhoods that perpetuates occasional more serious violence:** The main concerns of Ottawa residents who responded to our consultations center on: harassment when walking alone in their neighbourhoods; fear of victimization, particularly at night; and harmful activities related to drug use and drug dealing (e.g., drug users causing disturbances while accessing drug dealers, discarded paraphernalia in parks and on school properties, fights, intimidation). Most Ottawa residents who responded are more concerned with the everyday issues identified above than with ‘gang activity’ or serious occurrences of street violence (e.g., stabbings and shootings). While this can change in the immediate aftermath of a serious incident like a shooting, residents feel their everyday experiences of ‘low-level’ violence are poorly addressed and this remains their most prevalent ongoing concern.
- **The Strategy is focused on the right pillars:** Ottawa residents and service providers who responded feel the Ottawa Gang Strategy is focused on the right pillars and has led to good quality programming and effective projects. No key pillars appear to be missing from the Strategy.
- **Cross-agency and cross-sector collaboration has increased with a stronger foundation of effective relationships and services.** Service providers generally feel that the services offered to children, youth and families in Ottawa are engaging and responsive to needs. Although cross-agency collaboration has improved, there is still work to be done, particularly around information sharing and improving transitions at different stages – for example from custody to community supervision, and from youth systems to adult systems.
- **Each pillar of the Strategy has had some successes, but more still needs to be done.** The most popular recommendations were: improving responses to ‘low level’ violence in affected neighbourhoods; ensuring youth who are at risk of involvement in violence have access to consistent mentors and positive role models; ensuring employment supports and paid work opportunities for those involved in (or at risk of becoming involved in) street violence; and ensuring respectful exchanges between authorities, institutions, and residents in affected neighbourhoods not just through formal engagement groups but in everyday interactions including enforcement activities.

The table below highlights the key themes that were mentioned often throughout various consultations, and by more than one group of respondents. These are listed in order of priority - the theme that emerged most often is at the top of the list and the bullets follow an order of frequency of mention.

Key Themes from Consultations Carried Out in 2017

Pillar	Successes	Needs More Attention <i>(listed in order of frequency mentioned)</i>
Neighbourhood Cohesion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community groups in most affected areas have agreed to take on issues related to the Strategy including participation in new projects and processes • Multi-stakeholder discussions are happening in neighbourhoods affected by violence • There are some positive neighbourhood activities and good quality programs going on 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better responses to ‘low level’ violence that contributes to fear and perpetuates the cycle of more serious violence, so residents don’t feel disregarded and dismissed. Includes daily street harassment, intimidation, retribution, assaults, weapons carrying (knives and guns) • Lack of communication or disrespectful communication from authorities and institutions to residents when complaints are made discourages them from reporting again • Past experiences of retribution and fear of further retribution prevent residents from getting involved in reporting issues or in activities to resolve them • More resources to build on and sustain the good work happening in neighbourhoods • More balanced media portrayals (not just negative)
Prevention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are good programs to support families and youth at-risk of becoming involved in street violence, including siblings of those involved in street violence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing youth who are at risk of involvement in violence with consistent mentors and positive role models they can relate to (i.e., culturally and racially diverse) • Affordable and accessible sports, recreation and leisure opportunities for youth who need it most (including informal safe spaces and drop-ins) in their own neighbourhoods • Paid employment opportunities and career development for youth who need it most • Active outreach to harder-to-reach families and youth by catering to their interests and what they value • Bridging the gap between key service providers and racialized youth to increase trust, including in schools • Greater involvement of schools and educators in making the links for supports for youth who need it most • Tangible, consistent individual support for families in affected areas • Initiatives to encourage cross-cultural understanding and interaction between affected neighbourhoods/residents and less affected neighbourhoods/residents • Long-term investments in what is working well

Intervention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are good programs to support youth early on when they first come into contact with the justice system • There are good programs to support those involved in gangs and street violence to seek a different path 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tangible employment supports and paid work opportunities for those involved in street violence • Tangible and respectful supports for parents to be an effective part of change • Tangible supports for youth who struggle at school • Involvement of partners that represent the employment and business sectors • Mentors and positive role models for those who need it most • Intensive supports for those involved in the criminal justice system; tangible options and paid opportunities for those with criminal records • Accessible and effective services for those who struggle with substance misuse/addictions • Long-term investments in what is working well
Enforcement & Suppression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Police are involved at tables and in processes at community level • Community Police Officers are culturally responsive and generally present in affected neighbourhoods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistent respect and dignity for residents in affected neighbourhoods not just through formal engagement groups but in everyday enforcement interactions • Positive and effective communication from police regarding calls related to harassment, assault, underage substance misuse, and drug dealing in affected neighbourhoods – not to be dismissed as ‘low level’ violence feeds more serious issues • Two-way communication with police and residents on trends and solutions • Initiatives to build trust between police and residents in affected neighbourhoods • Cultural and racial diversity in police officers at enforcement level • Positive police presence on a regular basis, including bike patrols and walkabouts

4. WHAT THE STRATEGY WILL FOCUS ON IN 2017-2020

Overall, the consultations show support for the general direction of the Strategy and its efforts to date. The consultations reveal no real consistent information to support changing, adding or removing a pillar of the Strategy. Rather, respondents had clear ideas on what efforts within the existing pillars needed more attention moving forward. As such, the focus will remain on the four pillars of the Strategy that are still very much relevant to the needs of the community:

- Neighbourhood Cohesion
- Prevention
- Intervention
- Enforcement & Suppression

The sections below outline the 14 directions for the Strategy moving forward.

1. Better understanding & naming the issue: The Ottawa Street Violence & Gang Strategy

As a result of the changing realities observed by the Steering Committee and community partners about the nature and dynamics of street violence in Ottawa, highlighting the term ‘gang’ only within this strategy no longer seems accurate. Moving forward, the strategy will be referred to as the ***Ottawa Street Violence & Gang Strategy (OSVGS)*** in order to more accurately represent and encompass the harmful activities it seeks to address. This includes intimidation, harassment, assaults, robberies, stabbings and shootings, some of which may be related to well organized gang activity, but much of which is not. Partners involved in the Strategy will continue their efforts to better identify and understand the nature and dynamics of street violence in Ottawa.

2. Neighbourhood Cohesion

2.1 Continue to build positive relationships among and between residents and service providers in neighbourhoods affected by gang activity and street-level violence to reduce fear, strengthen relationships, increase positive social interaction, and increase community capacity to address unacceptable activities.

2.2 Increase positive and effective responses to what community members in affected neighbourhoods refer to as ‘low-level’ violence (i.e., constant street harassment, intimidation, retribution, common assaults, incidents linked to the drug trade). This low-level violence: largely contributes to fear in affected neighbourhoods; erodes opportunities for neighbourhood cohesion since people do not want to get further victimized or involved; decreases trust and confidence in authorities when calls and pleas are either ignored, dealt with disrespectfully, or have no consequences; allows for and perpetuates the cycle of more serious violence.

2.3 Address concerns around the presence of weapons and the possibility that there is a culture of carrying weapons among youth and young adults in affected neighbourhoods.

3. Prevention

3.1 Continue to develop and support initiatives that positively engage young people with their families, schools, and communities before they become involved in gang-related activities and violence.

3.2 Increase access to mentors and positive role models for youth living in neighbourhoods affected by violence. Ensure mentors are those that youth can relate to, including male mentors and mentors who are culturally and racially diverse with varying lived experiences.

3.3 Increase access to affordable, engaging and well supervised sports, recreation, arts and leisure opportunities for youth who need it most, in their own neighbourhoods (including informal safe spaces and drop-ins in existing community spaces). Ensure active outreach to harder-to-reach families and youth by catering to their interests and what *they* value (e.g., a variety of different sports and games, music, art, culture).

4. Intervention

4.1 Continue to positively engage youth and adults who are involved in or becoming involved in gang activity and street-level violence. This includes supports and resources for youth and adults in correctional institutions and for individuals under court-order conditions.

4.2 Increase access to tangible employment and entrepreneurship supports and paid employment / training opportunities for those currently or previously involved in street violence. This includes intensive supports for those involved in the criminal justice system and with criminal records.

4.3 Increase tangible and respectful opportunities for parents and families to be an effective part of positive change.

5. Enforcement & Suppression

5.1 Continue to enforce laws through targeted and sustained policing of street violence and criminal gang activity, prosecution, sentencing, incarceration, and court-ordered community supervision after release.

5.2 Improve the consistency of a policing approach that is based on respect and dignity for residents in affected neighbourhoods, not just through formal engagement opportunities but in everyday enforcement interactions between police officers and residents.

5.3 Support positive and effective responses of police and other institutions to calls and issues related to low-level violence in affected neighbourhoods including harassment, intimidation, retribution, assault, underage substance misuse, and activities / incidents related to drug dealing. Ensure partners are equipped to provide a high quality of response so that residents in affected neighbourhoods feel heard and not alone.

6. Remain responsive to the needs of the community through attention to other emerging or pressing issues that arise.

5. NEXT STEPS: GOVERNANCE, WORK PLAN & EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

With this renewed direction and focus, the partners involved in the Strategy will continue to move forward together. Working collaboratively, members of the Steering Committee will focus on the following tasks over the next few months:

- decide on the best governance model to move the refreshed Strategy forward successfully and achieve results.
- review the Strategy's existing Terms of Reference to ensure they reflect the refreshed governance model.
- articulate an Action Plan and develop a new Evaluation Framework that builds on the metrics and outcomes measured in the past, and adds indicators to assess new directions.

The Ottawa Street Violence Strategy will continue to align itself with other strategies in the city aimed at increasing health and wellbeing, including the Ottawa Child and Youth Initiative and the Community Development Framework. The members and partners involved in the Strategy look forward to continuing this important work together.