

## **GANGS AND GANG AFFILIATION (Detention)**

### **OBJECTIVES**

- Staff will learn to identify gang members in the facility
- Staff will learn to control and restrict gang activity in the facility

Gangs are a big problem in America, and a bigger problem for detention operations and detention staff. Street gang members are arrested and incarcerated in virtually every facility every day. Research has shown that as many as 25% of all adult male inmates are gang members and the number is growing. The number of female gang members incarcerated is also on the rise. It's a problem that is going to affect you, so you need to understand how to identify gang members and what you can do to protect yourself, your fellow officers, and the other inmates in the facility.

A gang can be defined as a group of individuals who threaten, coerce, or harass others or who engage in or encourage illegal and illicit activities. In a detention facility, gangs are more often formed around race and ethnicity, or to promote criminal activities such as: the introduction and distribution of drugs; intimidation of weaker inmates, extortion and strong-arming; violence between gangs and among individual members; threats and intimidation against staff and an increase in racial and ethnic tensions leading to wider disturbances. But it's important to remember that not every group in a detention facility is a gang. Inmate groups can develop around almost any cause including geography, religion, or common interests. But a group is not the same as a gang.

### **SIGNS AND INDICATORS OF GANGS**

How can you tell if you have active gangs in your facility? Most likely management will be aware of it and you will be routinely briefed on their activities. But there are some early warning signs that indicate that gang influence is growing. You need to be aware of these signs so you can report and take action whenever they are encountered.

Early warning signs of gangs include:

- Increase in assaults on both inmates and staff
- Increase in protective custody requests
- Increase in unit transfers
- Increase in self-mutilations
- Increase in body tattoos
- Increase in gang related apparel
- Information from confidential informants
- Information from other criminal justice agencies

- Increase in inmate groupings at programs, recreation, or housing
- Increase in gang activities in the community outside the facility
- Deterioration of morale among inmates and staff

When encountering these early warning signs, look for specific gang indicators among the inmate population. There are several ways of identifying gang members.

- 1) Monikers which are the street names that the inmates go by. These names often reflect the member's physical characteristics-how the gang sees him or how he sees himself.
- 2) Tattoos. While there is a declining trend among gangs towards tattoos to avoid attention, tattoos continue to be an important indicator of membership.
- 3) Clothing. Gang clothing may be seen just after arrest and before the inmate is issued facility garments. While bandannas or baseball caps with logos may be obvious, subtle items such as colored shoestrings, colored rubber bands, belts with gang colors, or sports clothing whose logos have been co-opted as gang acronyms may also be seen.
- 4) Hair styles. Heads may be cut close on the sides, processed into waves or curls, or shaved off completely.
- 5) Hand signs. Gang members may use their fingers or position their hands to throw a sign that not only indicates their gang membership, but is also used to intimidate rival gang members.
- 6) Language. The use of particular language or speech patterns can also be an indicator of gang membership. These patterns are often local, so pay attention to the language you hear at your facility.
- 7) Associates. The inmate may be identified as a gang member from the people he or she associates with. Gangs tend to stick together and exclude outsiders.
- 8) Photographs. Gangs like to have group photographs taken. These photos can often be used to identify gang members.
- 9) Visitors. Inmate gang members may also be visited by their friends and associates from the outside whose gang affiliation is known.
- 10) Testimony or conversations. Gang members may identify themselves or be identified by other informants. Be careful about these statements because there may be reasons for the identifying inmate to lie to protect himself or others.
- 11) History. Case history reflecting past gang membership should be explored.
- 12) Debriefing techniques. Former gang members should be debriefed in order to gather intelligence.

## **CONTROLLING AND RESTRICTING ACTIVITY**

The most important step in controlling gang activity is to identify gang members at intake. Proper identification and classification means that gang members will be separated from each other in housing units and their behavior monitored closely to prevent gang activity. There are several strategies used to control gang activity:

- 1) Searches. Cell searches should be conducted at least once a week. Frisk and strip searches may be used on gang members with sufficient justification.
- 2) Mail. All incoming and outgoing mail (except legal mail) should be opened, read, and checked for contraband by designated staff. Any mail that is seen to be threatening to the safety of the facility should be copied, rejected, or withheld.
- 3) Telephone. All telephone calls should be subjected to monitoring and recording. Upon notification, calls to an attorney must be private.
- 4) Inmate accounts. The inmate's financial accounts should be monitored for suspicious activity.
- 5) Reclassification. Any gang affiliated inmate who displays disruptive or potentially dangerous conduct must be quickly segregated from other inmates.
- 6) Work or program assignments. Active gang members assigned to a work site or program must be in a specific location under constant supervision. Work assignments outside the facility's perimeter should not be permitted.
- 7) Visits. Contact visits should not be authorized. Visits should be restricted to attorneys and approved immediate family members only.
- 8) Sentence credits. As specified in policy and procedures, credits for good behavior should not be granted and restoring forfeited good time should not be permitted when gang activity is documented.
- 9) Job restrictions. Assignments inside the facility should not be permitted.
- 10) Housing. Facilities should employ housing strategies that will restrict gang operations. These strategies might include lockdowns, administrative segregation, or protective custody. Housing active members of the same gang in the same cell should be prohibited whenever possible.

## **POLICY**

*Review all department policies, procedures, and post orders relating to gangs, gang members, and gang affiliation.*

## **CLOSING**

- *Encourage discussion about this presentation, gangs, and the need to continuously monitor gang activity in the facility.*