

Case Scenarios: Situations of Risk

**Community Solution to Gang Violence
December 2005**

Some Situations At Risk

In an attempt to reflect the realities we face in addressing gang violence and the complexities surrounding the lives of young people we developed a number of case scenarios¹ to show the complexities surrounding the lives of young people who may become vulnerable to gang involvement. These case scenarios have been developed by weaving the knowledge and experience of service providers together with research on risk and protective factors associated with gang involvement, substance abuse, violence and other problem behaviours.² to paint a picture of the “gang situation” and bring it down to a human level. They are not case studies of actual persons but composite profiles of situations of risk surrounding vulnerable young people. They are a tool to describe the realities we are trying to change. They provide a jumping off point to talk about the complexities of young people’s lives and our assumptions about why young people may become involved with gangs.

Using the Tool

Review the case scenario’s and determine how these scenarios fit with your experiences and knowledge of the dynamics and conditions that give rise to gangs.

- How reflective are these scenarios of your experiences with young people?
- Does your organization’s mandate enable you to intervene in these scenarios? How?
- How do we as a community commonly deal with situations like these?
- What are some of the private troubles within these scenarios?
- What are the related public issues within these scenarios?

² Conversations and interviews with ex-gang members and Working Group members, review of CSGV Consolidated Working Group Notes. Carlie, Mike “Part 2: Risk and Protective Factors” [Into the Abyss](http://www.faculty.smsu.edu/m/mkc096f/SOLUTIONS/ISSUE/risk_protective.htm). 2002. http://www.faculty.smsu.edu/m/mkc096f/SOLUTIONS/ISSUE/risk_protective.htm. Howell, James. “Youth Gangs: An Overview”. [Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention](http://www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles/167249.pdf). August 1998. <http://www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles/167249.pdf> Youth and Violence Fact Sheet (NCFV). Public Health Agency of Canada. http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ncfv-nivf/familyviolence/html/nfntsyjviolence_e.html [Healthy Communities Healthy Youth. A National Initiative of the Search Institute to Unite Communities for Children and Adolescents](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ncfv-nivf/familyviolence/html/nfntsyjviolence_e.html). Minneapolis: Search Institute.

Scenario 1: Jason

Jason is 16 years old and lives with his parents and sister aged 12 in the suburbs of the city. His neighbourhood is largely made up of single-home dwellings, townhouses and condominiums. His neighbours are largely upper middle-class Caucasians like his own family. Jason's father owns a small business and often works late and on weekends. His mother works for a public relations firm which requires several out of town trips each year.

Community

There are few services within the neighbourhood and most services are centered on large commercial developments and malls. The community league runs a summer program and some recreation programs for children throughout the year which for the most part cater to 6 to 12 year olds. The community league also sponsors soccer during the spring and operates the arena in the fall and winter. There are no after-school programs or youth centres in the neighbourhood. The closest youth centre is located several miles away near one of the malls.

Jason knows a few of the neighbours by name and occasionally visits friends in the neighbourhood but since he left elementary school to attend junior high doesn't see them very much. He tends to hang out in the mall with kids from his high school who live in different parts of the city. Adults in the neighbourhood have become increasingly concerned with the amount of vandalism and petty theft in the neighbourhood and are pushing to establish a curfew to keep kids off the streets after 11:00 p.m. The local corner stores have signs in their establishments limiting the number of teenagers allowed in the store at one time.

Family Life

Jason's parents are hard working and successful in their work and tended to spend a lot of time at work. Jason is expected to be the responsible person at home, making dinner for his sister, take her to her music lessons and generally keep an eye out for her. Jason's parents have high expectations of Jason to do well and his father expects that Jason will someday take over the family business.

Somehow no matter what Jason does it is never seems to be quite good enough --- if he gets B's at school he is told that with a little more work he could get A's. His parents constantly criticized him for his choice of friends, his taste in music and the way he dresses. If he forgot to do his chores he would be grounded for a week. Somehow he always fails to meet his parents expectations and often feels like a disappointment or failure most of the time. His sister Alyssia on the other hand is the "model child". She gets straight A's in school, had nice friends and always does the right thing. Everything seemed to work out for her at home.

Jason used to spend a lot of time with his an uncle who lives on the other side of the city. They both liked the same music and would often spend time listening to music or going to concerts together. However, his parents had a falling out with the uncle and they rarely see each other anymore.

School

Jason attends high school in a nearby neighbourhood. He did well in elementary school but in grade nine his grades began to drop and now in Grade 10 he is barely scraping by. He played in a school band in junior high but the high school doesn't have a music program so he no longer plays his saxophone very much. He doesn't know many of the kids at his high-school and since his school is big into sports and he isn't very athletic he doesn't feel like he really fits in. He mostly just goes to school and tries to remain unnoticed and out of trouble.

Personal Life

Jason spends most of his time at home listening to music or hanging out in the mall with "misfits" as his parents call them. Lately he has been spending more time with another boy who plays the guitar and they jam at his friend's garage where they have set up a make-shift studio. When the other boy's parents aren't home they have a few drinks and a few joints. Jason's mother found a joint in his room and he was grounded for a month and was told that if he ever did that again he would be sent packing. While Jason didn't use drugs much before he is now smoking several joints a day. His friend used to sell a few joints to kids at school but is now selling ecstasy and crack and has asked Jason if he would be interested in selling. He says that he knows a guy who supplies him and a few other friends and that it is easy money. Since Jason has a car his friend tells him that people would be really interested in having him join "their business". While Jason is given lots of spending money by his parents he Jason is considering the offer as this is the first time he has felt like he has found a friend who accepts him for who he is. Lately he has been feeling more and more empty, spends as little time at home as possible and hardly ever talks to his family about what he is doing or what he thinks or feels.

Services and Organizations

Neither Jason or his family have ever used any services or agencies. His parents are intensely personal and believe that people who use social services are somehow incompetent. They believe that they are capable of handling their own affairs. They do not see a need for help and feel that Jason is just going through the trials of teenage years and will straighten out eventually.

Scenario 2: Ken

Ken is 11 years old and lives with his parents and 3 siblings in the inner city. His neighbourhood is made up of apartment buildings, and a few single dwellings. His neighbours are a vibrant mix of immigrant, refugee, First Nations, Métis and Caucasians. For the most part the neighbourhood is considered to be low-income/working class and the majority of people live in rental units. Ken's mother and father immigrated to Canada 17 years ago and 3 of their 4 children were born in Canada. His parents' ability to speak English is limited and they are both employed in service related jobs. They work in restaurants during the day and have a janitor contract to clean an office building in the evening.

Community

The community is densely populated and is peppered with a number of services— restaurants, arcades, bars, casinos, pawn shops — that draw people from all over the city. As there is a significant low-income and immigrant population in the neighbourhood the area is also served by a number of social services and immigrant settlement services, alternate school programs and community league programs that provide services to children and young people.

Ken knows several of his neighbours by name particularly those who immigrated from the same country as his parents. They tended to gather with their neighbours for cultural celebrations and other events hosted by a community organization serving people of the same ethnic community. While the neighbourhood is fairly close knit and friendly, the proximity to the downtown night life also attracts people who make a living from and who use the "street services" (prostitution and drugs). As a result, the streets produce some dangers and attractions to young people and families living in the area. The community has attempted to organize itself to deal with these negative influences but the challenges are complex and constant and they tax the energies of the community and organizing efforts are difficult to sustain.

Family Life

Ken's parents are hard working and moved to Canada to make a better life for their children. His father works in a restaurant from 6:00 a.m. to 3:30 and both his mother and father work as janitors from 5:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. six days a week. On the one day of the week when they are all home they try to do something as a family but all too often the demands of daily household chores take over from the outings.

For the most part the care and supervision of Ken, the youngest is left to his other sister who is 13 and his older brothers who are 16 and 18. Ken's 13 year old sister spends most of her time with friends or staying home with Ken. She is very responsible, quiet and well-mannered although she and Ken share few common interests. Ken's 16 year old brother spends a lot of time hanging out with his friends at the arcade and the school ground and is rarely home. Ken's oldest brother started to help out by working at part-time jobs when he was 14 and now that he is 18 and finished high-school he is bringing in considerable money into the household. He doesn't talk about his job much but the indications are that he is involved with running drugs for a close member of the family.

Because the parents' English skills are limited they speak their mother tongue at home. However, since the children spend more time at school speaking English and speak English among themselves they are slowly losing their mother tongue. As a result, the parents and the children are often conflicted over which language to speak and which cultural rules they should follow. All but their oldest child was born in Canada and they all consider themselves Canadian and want to act like a Canadian. The parents on the other hand tend to speak the mother tongue, associate with others from the same country and follow the customs of their mother country. Increasingly this cultural and language divide has decreased the amount of time that the family spends interacting with each other and the tendency is for each to go their own way.

School

Although Ken works hard in school he struggles with his reading and writing and has been put into a special needs class. He is very quiet and shy and rarely asks for help from the teacher when he struggles with his homework. He stays up late waiting for his parents to come home from work so he often goes to school tired and has fallen asleep several times at school. While he doesn't participate in any extra-curricular activities he enjoys playing soccer and basket ball.

Personal Life

Ken spends most of his time at home watching T.V. or playing with his Game Boy. Some nights he and his sister go with his parents and help them do their janitorial work so they can come home earlier and spend a bit more time together. He has a good relationship with his parents but he hardly speaks their mother tongue so their conversations are sometimes difficult and strained. Ken has a few friends that he plays with after school but since he is very shy he rarely participates in any of the activities offered through the community league or drop-in centre. Ken admires his older brothers and tries to mimic the way they talk and dress since he thinks they are cool. While his parents can not afford to buy him the shoes and clothes that the kids at school have, his older brother often takes him shopping to buy things like GameBoy games and cool clothes.

Services and Organizations

Although there is an after-school program and a homework club at the school, Ken does not use these services. He is too shy to go there alone and nobody has thought to help him get involved with these support services.

Scenario 3: Daniel

Daniel is 20 years old and lives with his girlfriend in the northeast of the City. He lives with his girlfriend who is pregnant with his child and her two children from previous relationships, who are aged 1 and 2. His neighbourhood is made up of apartment buildings, townhouses and some single house dwellings. The majority of people in his neighbourhood are on income support payments or working in low-paying jobs. Most of the neighbours like Daniel live in rental units.

Community

The community has some retail services scattered along strip malls and strips of the highway but there is no real community core. For the most part the neighbourhood is surrounded by warehouses and industrial developments. There are a few social services — daycare centres, youth centres, Children's Services and a scattering of social service agencies but they are located some distance from where Daniel and his girlfriend live. The community league runs a summer program and some recreation programs for children throughout the year which for the most part cater to 6 to 12 year olds. The community league also sponsors soccer during the spring and operates the arena in the fall and winter.

The community is considered to be a high-needs, low income area and has a fairly high crime rate (property crimes, crimes against persons, juvenile crime and family disputes). People tend to move in and out of their rental units which limits the ability of neighbours to get to know each other or develop a strong sense of community. Daniel and his girlfriend know a few of their neighbours, mostly young people like themselves who spend a lot of time watching T.V., playing video games and hanging out at the bar when they have some money. Otherwise, people tend to "mind their own business."

Family Life

Daniel moved to the City from a First Nations community in the northern part of the province to get away from the poverty and make a better life for himself. Daniel along with his 2 younger siblings and older sister and older brother was raised in a fairly neglectful and abusive environment by his father and mother. Daniel's father was an alcoholic and spent a lot of time in institutions. His mother tried her best but she had her own problems with alcohol and was often physically abused by his father so she tended to be quiet and out of sight. For the most part, Daniel like his siblings was left to raise himself although he did have a positive relationship with his grandmother who took him to live with her when she could. After his grandmother died, Daniel moved to Edmonton to make a better life for himself, since he saw no future on the reserve. Daniel has some cousins and uncles who moved to the City before him and are his main source of support.

Daniel and his girlfriend, Angela have an on again off again relationship that is marred by alcohol and drugs. Angela is struggling to give up crack now that she is pregnant. Daniel tries to be supportive but other than telling her not to take the stuff doesn't know what else to do. Daniel does not take drugs himself but occasionally goes on drinking binges that can last several days. Usually these binges are cut short by a lack of money and he will go for weeks without touching a drink. He tries to help Angela

out with her kids but since they are not his kids he doesn't really feel like their father. However, he is very excited that Angela is going to have his baby and talks about them moving to a better place to raise the baby.

School

Daniel dropped out of school half way through Grade 9. He can barely read and write and has been diagnosed with borderline ADHD. He has been accepted into an upgrading program and while he sees this as a chance to make a better life, he knows that he has never been very good at school work and is worried that he won't make it or will get kicked out as he has in the past.

Personal Life

Daniel spend most of his time playing video games and watching T.V when he is home. He also hangs out with his cousins and a few friends that he has met in the neighbourhood. Daniel has made some attempts to find a job but since he has limited skills and no real job experience he only gets occasional work. His main source of extra income comes from work he does for his cousins who are involved in an aboriginal gang. He has stored drugs and weapons in the past and has been involved in selling drugs for his cousins. Since he keeps quiet about this work and is considered trustworthy his cousins have suggested that he get jumped in to the gang and become more involved in the business.

Daniel suffers from bouts of depression and gets real down on himself for not being a good provider. He believes that he could make more money through the gangs and because he would like to move to a better apartment and buy things for the baby he is tempted to "up his involvement with the gang".

Services and Organizations

The primary contact Daniel has had with agencies is with the income assistance worker who he has to see occasionally for his welfare payments and the people at the school where he has been accepted for upgrading. Daniel doesn't want his child to live the life he has and feels burdened by the pressures of becoming a father. He has put their name on a waiting list for subsidized housing in a better part of the neighbourhood but he has been told that it would be at least a year before they would be able to move. Daniel doesn't know where to turn for help and doubts that anybody could help him since things have never worked out in the past.

Scenario 4: Donna

Donna is 17 years old and lives with her 10 month old baby, her grandmother, brother and sister in a subsidized housing complex in the central part of the City. Her boyfriend, the father of the baby lives with them off and on. Her neighbourhood is made up of single house dwellings, apartment buildings, townhouses and is largely middle-class. However, her most immediate neighbours who live in subsidized housing are on income assistance or considered to be the “working poor”.

Community

There are few services within the neighbourhood and most services are centered on large commercial developments and malls. The community league runs a summer program and some recreation programs for children throughout the year which for the most part cater to 6 to 12 year olds. The community league also sponsors soccer during the spring and operates the arena in the fall and winter. There is also a family centre in the neighbourhood that offers drop-in programs for young parents. However, neither Donna or other members of her family not take part in any of these activities.

Donna has a few friends in the housing complex mostly other young single mothers like herself and they occasionally get together to watch a movie, have a few drinks and generally hang out. Occasionally Donna will leave her son with one of these friends when she goes out with her boyfriend or needs to run an errand. Drugs are readily available in the community, particularly in the housing complex and the police have busted a number of her neighbours for drugs and gang related activity.

Family Life

Donna, her brother and sister along with 3 other siblings were raised by her grandmother in the City. Donna’s parents were too far into drug and alcohol abuse to be able to care for their children and her grandmother tried to step in and make a home for her grandchildren. The grandmother loves her grandchildren and does her best but her health is failing and she assumed and less and less influence over the household as Donna and her siblings grew older. Now, she pretty much keeps to herself and Donna her siblings run the house. Donna’s 3 other siblings also live in the City and there is much moving back and forth as they change living arrangements. Sometimes they live with Donna and her grandmother, sometimes Donna moves in with them and at times with friends hanging on there can be up to 12 people living in the complex.

Donna’s boyfriend, the father of her baby, is involved with one of the local gangs and he often brings gang members to the house. Although they mostly sell drugs they occasionally use the drugs themselves when they feel like celebrating. They also drink fairly heavily when they get together. Donna tries to keep her baby away from them but she has little influence over them or her boyfriend. He is the boss man as he says and he will raise his son they way he thinks best. When her boyfriend’s associates are around he will fuss over the baby, dressing him in colours and talking about how tough he is going to be.

School

Donna struggled with school and never attended school consistently. She was placed in special learning classes after she was diagnosed as having fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. Attempts were made to give her extra support but her comprehension difficulties coupled with her poor attendance made it an uphill battle. She dropped out of school at 15 and is now barely literate.

Personal Life

Because Donna's boyfriend is involved with gangs, her life and that of her baby is also tied into the gang. When her boyfriend is around other gang members he lets everyone around him know who is boss. He orders Donna around and expects her to answer to his every beck and call. Lately this has evolved into his demands that she sell drugs and prostitute for the good of the gang. Whatever money she makes, he takes. She has to sneak money to pay for food and clothes for her baby.

When Donna is forced to join her boyfriend on gang business — selling drugs, prostitution or just being available to him — she leaves her baby with her grandmother or her friends in the housing complex. Sometimes this works but often it doesn't and she doesn't know what to do with her baby. Once Children's Services were called in when the baby was left alone but the grandmother stepped in and the baby was not taken into care. However, Donna got caught selling drugs and now has a criminal record and is really worried that Children's Services will take her baby away.

Part of her knows that the gang life of her boyfriend is bad for her and her baby but she doesn't know how to change things. Her boyfriend occasionally buys her clothes and things for the baby that she needs. She tried to leave her boyfriend and the gangs several times but was always drawn back — sometimes because her boyfriend threatened her if she didn't come back and other times because she was lonely and bored. She feels alternately trapped and comforted by being involved with her boyfriend and the gang.

Services and Organizations

Because of her criminal record Donna is receiving services from an organization that provides support to people involved in the criminal justice system. She has a good relationship with her worker and is beginning to open up to the offer of services. She is particularly interested in joining a mother's support group but because of her affiliation with gangs, the agency is reluctant to accept her into the program.

Scenario 5: Sonny

Sonny is 15 years old and is living with his father and step mother in the central part of the city. His neighbourhood is made up of apartment buildings, townhouses and some single house dwellings. For the most part the neighbourhood is considered to be low-income/working class and the majority of people live in rental units. His father is unable to work due to his Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, which makes it very difficult for him learn and function in a structure and his step-mother stays at home as her English skills are also too limited to find and keep work .

Sonny, his father and step-mother are refugees who came to Canada two years ago. They had to flee their home country because they were members of a political minority within their country and were threatened and persecuted by the government and army. Sonny's father left their country 8 years before the rest of the family to work and get the funds to move his family to safety. After 8 years, he tried to bring his family together but they were turned back at the boarder. They tried to go to another country but were turned back again. This time tragedy struck — the boat they were travelling in sunk and all members of the family except Sonny and his father drowned. Both Sonny and his father tried to save the members of their family but couldn't and they saw them drown. Finally, after a third attempt, they were able to stay in a refugee camp in yet another country. The time spent in the refugee camp was harsh Sonny learned to use his charm and ability to barter and steal food and goods for the family. After several more months in this refugee camp where Sonny's father met and married his step-mother, the family was finally accepted as refugees in Canada.

Community

The community is densely populated and is peppered with a number of services— restaurants, arcades, bars, casinos, pawn shops — that draw people from all over the city. As there is a significant low-income and immigrant population in the neighbourhood the area is also served by a number of social services and immigrant settlement services, alternate school programs and community league programs that provide services to children and young people.

Sonny, his father and stepmother are socially isolated and know few of their neighbours. His step-father works long hours and is often away from home. His step-mother is also very isolated only going out of the apartment accompanied by her husband or Sonny.

Family Life

Sonny's father has a distant relationship with his wife and Sonny. He suffers from serious depression and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms. He is unable to sleep at night, has nightmares which keep waking him up and so sleeps in spurts during the day. He has difficulties to concentrate on anything, making it impossible to learn a new language and script and his mood is low , exacerbated by the sleep deprivation he suffers.. His wife is several years younger and although they share the same religion they are from different cultures and have some difficulties in their relationship. The trauma of losing his family plagues his ability to make any deep connections to his new wife and there are occasional when he physically assaults her. The relationship between Sonny and his step-mother is very ambivalent. While she tries to provide a good home

for her family and tries to be a good mother, she can't replace Sonny's birth mother. Their relationship too is distant and somewhat vacant. For the most part, members of the family are in a very cramped (1 bedroom apartment) environment, which enhances the tension as it is difficult to have positive interactions with all that's going on. Also, while Sonny "Canadianizes" very quickly, wanting to fit in at school, his parents have little contact to the new environment and don't understand the world in which Sonny moves and lives.

School

Sonny has spent very little time in his life in school. His schooling was very limited in his home country and he spent most of his time getting food and goods for his family. When he arrived in Canada , at age 13 he spoke no English and had few basic skills. He was put in an ESL program and learned English very quickly. He was then moved to a regular program but he was way behind the other children in his class and constantly struggled with his work. His poor concentration, coupled with his lack of social skills and the trauma of losing his family and living in refugee camps made it very difficult for Sonny to meet with much success. He started to avoid school, skipping out or leaving early and has been suspended a few times for getting into fights with other kids.

Personal Life

Sonny, like his father suffers from severe depression becoming suicidal at times. He often feels guilty that he survived while other members of his family perished. His behaviour changes between depression and exuberance and he can be very annoying to his peers and to adults around him. He can also be very charming and has learned that he can use his charm, manipulation skills and stories to get what he needs— skills that served him well in his home country and in refugee camps. Increasingly Sonny is spending less and less time at school or at home and tends to stay out late at night hanging out on the street.

Services and Organizations

Teachers and school staff tried to help Sonny adjust to his new school life but his sometimes very difficult behaviour and the complexity of his background and the trauma he experienced was beyond the scope of their services. Sonny and his family were referred to a therapist for counselling. and while the father didn't follow through, the therapist continued to meet with Sonny. Initially they worked through an interpreter but eventually as Sonny's English improved they began to meet on their own and began to establish a fairly good relationship. While they made some gains they were not able to deal effectively with the dynamics within the home. Children's Services became involved after Sonny called to report that he was being physically abused by his father. He was put into foster care which was a good experience but was returned to the father after it was discovered that the allegations of abuse were not substantiated. In an attempt to deal with the situation, the father took his wife and Sonny back to their home country to see if things would be better there. Sonny stayed for about 5 months longer than his parents but eventually he too returned to Edmonton.

The therapist still keeps occasional contact with Sonny but since he hooked up with an older friend, she sees him less and less. When she does see him, Sonny is wearing new clothes, gold chains and an expensive watch that obviously didn't come from anyone in the family. He spends less time at home and more time with his new friend, often disappearing for months on end.