Quarterly Insights | June 2023

NEW ZEALAND
Gang Harm Insights Centre

The Gang Harm Insights Centre (GHIC)

A multi-agency team focused on better understanding the New Zealand gang environment, while focusing on the social structures that underpin harmful behaviours.

A model for change: our inter-agency collaboration improves our understanding of gang-related harm.

Influencing narratives: we work with agencies and communities to hear their experience, using holistic insights to re-frame gang-related harm narratives.

Strengthening impact: we strengthen the quality, reliability and extent of information relating to gang harm.

An Aotearoa free from gang-related harm and trauma.

GHIC Purpose Te Aronga

We actively partner to deliver holistic, actionable, and timely insights, enabling agencies to empower communities in making a difference to gang-related harm. Highlighting the voices and experiences of our gang communities strengthens our understanding of the harm occurring by, to, and within the community and ensures we can support and enable gang communities to implement and create lasting positive outcomes for whānau.

GHIC Approach

Life Course Perspectives

We use research and insights to show how life experiences from birth to old age shape who we are, and our access to opportunities that support individuals and whānau to thrive.

Working Together

We build reciprocal partnerships with communities, recognising we only have half the picture if we do not hear, and amplify in our work, their experiences and insights.

Diverse Frameworks

We acknowledge that different cultures understand evidence and insights differently, including how we collect information and what data we value. We strive to build an insights centre that supports different cultural perspectives.

We demonstrate deep conceptual knowledge, combined with analytic tradecraft and curiosity.

Ka mua, ka muri
Looking back to move forward

Mahitahitanga
We build authentic, transparent and sustained cross agency and community relationships.

Kaitiakitanga
We take seriously our ethical and cultural stewardship of data and information.

He Tāngata
We hold people and communities at the centre of all we do.

Rangatiratanga
We enable agencies to support individuals, whānau and communities to thrive.

Manaakitanga
We strive to uphold the mana of all, building reciprocity across all we do.

We champion the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and mātauranga Māori.

Experiences of Gang Members are Unique

Many factors influence an individual's pathway to joining a gang, and often these experiences are unique. While some factors are positive, many are a result of hardships. Understanding these experiences will better enable us to reduce harm for our people and future generations.

Gang communities are largely located in deprived areas. Deprivation creates significant barriers, particularly for tamariki. It can impact educational attainment, health, and overall well-being.

Gang membership in Aotearoa is often influenced by the existence of gangs in the wider whānau, peer groups, and community. However, individuals who are not immersed in these communities also find their way into gang life. Gangs often provide a sense of family, brotherhood, status, and belonging and acceptance that were not fulfilled elsewhere.

Some NZAG remain entrenched in organised crime and may be perpetrators of harm in the community. Socioeconomic inequalities and cultural disconnection continues to exist and impact the well-being of individuals within these communities, including their partners, children, whānau and the wider community around them.

Public perception often supports the disestablishment of gangs and exclusion of these individuals and their whānau from society. However, gangs are embedded in Aotearoa and intertwined within whānau and hāpori. Instead, focus needs to be pushed towards creating better opportunities and support for those within gang communities to reduce harm experienced by, to and within. This will uplift and work towards reducing intergenerational trauma and removing some of the stigma and barriers these communities regularly face to influence negative behaviour often associated with gangs.

Changing the Focus

A shift from focusing on preventing gang membership and growth, to addressing the factors influencing the behaviours and criminality often synonymous with gang membership. An in-depth understanding of these environments is needed.

A holistic understanding of the life cycle of gang membership, coupled with a preventative multi-agency, community led approach addressing long term harm and the factors that enable, facilitate and reinforce harmful behaviour is critical. This will include real life stories and experiences to create a holistic view and understanding.
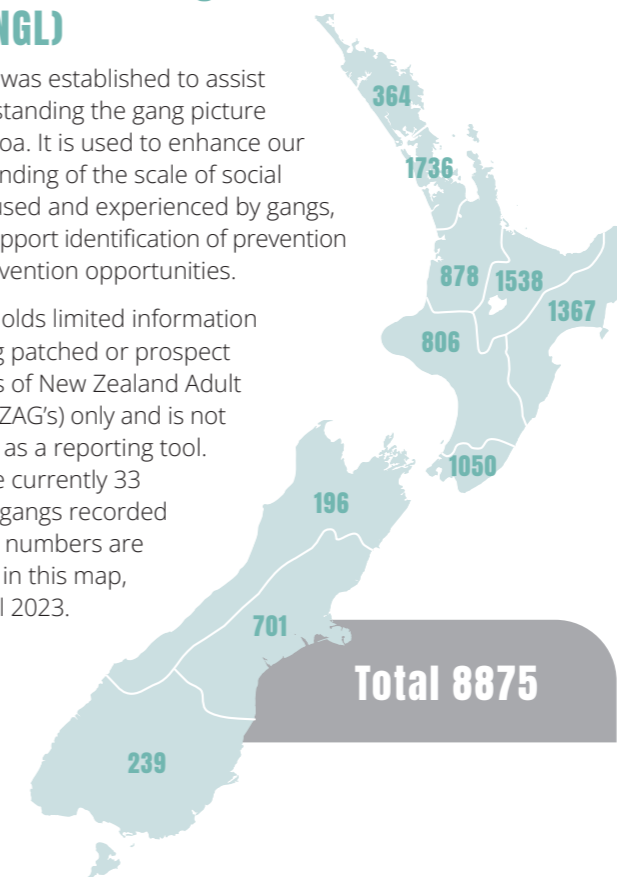
Fostering and encouraging the positive aspects of gang communities, as well as the growth of healthy behaviours and environments, to effect long term change and impact a cultural shift with gang environment towards improved well-being, outcomes, and community empowerment.

The National Gang List (NGL)

The NGL was established to assist in understanding the gang picture in Aotearoa. It is used to enhance our understanding of the scale of social harm caused and experienced by gangs, and to support identification of prevention and intervention opportunities.

This list holds limited information regarding patched or prospect members of New Zealand Adult Gangs (NZAG's) only and is not intended as a reporting tool. There are currently 33 different gangs recorded and their numbers are reflected in this map, as at April 2023.

364
1736
878 1538
806 1367
196
1050
701
239

Total 8875

ORANGA TAMARIKI
Ministry for Children

Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga
Ministry of Education

NEW ZEALAND POLICE
Ngā Pirihimana o Aotearoa

MINISTRY OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO ORA

MANATŪ HAUORA
MINISTRY OF HEALTH

NEW ZEALAND CUSTOMS SERVICE
TE MANA ĀRAI O AOTEAROA

Kāinga Ora
Homes and Communities

acc
He Kaupare. He Manaaki. He Whakaora.
prevention. care. recovery.

ARA POUTAMA AOTEAROA
DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

Te Tari Taiwhenua
Internal Affairs

Inland Revenue
Te Tari Taake

MINISTRY OF BUSINESS, INNOVATION & EMPLOYMENT
HĪKINA WHAKATUTUKI

This work is focused around understanding the harm caused by to and within gang whānau. There is a strong focus around building resilience within communities. The content varies each quarter and is not reflective of all mahi supporting cross government initiatives, such as enforcement activity or individual inter-agency lines of effort.

The Gang Environment in Aotearoa

The gang environment in Aotearoa has undergone constant changes since gangs first appeared in the 1950's.

The shift in urbanisation, loss of cultural connectivity and identity, immigration and economic conditions boosted gang membership and altered ethnic makeup in the 1970's to majority Māori and Pacific membership.

Gang membership provided a sense of belonging and acceptance for those who were marginalised and faced significant challenges residing in urban NZ. These factors are still relevant today.

Previously NZ's gang environment had a clear distinction between motor-cycle based and other patch wearing gangs. In recent years many of these gangs characteristics have merged.

Youth in NZ adult gangs on the NGL has increased but are very low numbers. 12% of the NZAG population are 25 years or under.

Environments

Social and economic conditions differ across gang communities, however, a high proportion live in areas of high deprivation, family harm, and unemployment. There is often co-occurring low levels of formal education. Despite these factors, there are significant barriers to gang whānau accessing support and services.

Stigma, discrimination, previous negative experiences, and long-standing distrust of public agencies and services often delays gang whānau from accessing support. This leads to less routes out of deprivation, causing some to engage in crime to support their families.

Engagement

Engaging with gang communities to understand the drivers of harm and the barriers of support, will lead to realistic opportunities to enable and better support whānau. Building mutual relationships and trust between government agencies and these communities is essential.

Gang whānau have voiced that they are uncomfortable interacting with mainstream support services and are less likely to seek this type of support. However, some members noticed more personal growth and achievement after seeking support. This emphasises the need to break down barriers in order to enable, or be led by, our gang communities and the whānau within them to be supported.

Gang whānau can reach into communities that government agencies often struggle to engage with. Equally, agencies often have key resources that gang whānau are reluctant to engage with.

Therefore, collaboration is needed to develop approaches tailored to each unique community. This will ensure their needs are being targeted in relevant ways and enable whānau to achieve long term positive changes from within.

Futures

We know the majority of NZAG members desire positive outcomes for their families, particularly for their tamariki. This includes financial stability, education, employment, improved health and mental health and better well-being outcomes. However, some are not equipped with the right tools to enable this success, including managing conflict within the family environment.

> For communities to thrive, effective engagement must be trauma informed and involve a wrap-around collaborative approach.

Leaving a Gang

Leaving a gang can be a difficult and complex journey. Membership often consumes all aspects of an individuals life including family, social networks, employment and housing opportunities. This can involve leaving behind everything they know.

Members wishing to leave their environment require a wide range of support to work through these barriers and challenges.

Harm

The cycle of abuse and harm is evident in many gang families. Throughout their lifetime almost half of NGL members have been victims of family harm. In many cases, these experiences have perpetuated a cycle of intergenerational harm which has shaped the way in which gang members interact in their familial environments as adults, partners, and parents.

Negative public sentiment, alienation, and social exclusion provide further obstacles for gang members. This amplifies existing hardship and barriers, which limits positive experiences and opportunities.

A leading cause of violence being normalised within gangs is intergenerational trauma. For some gang members, their identities were developed and unified through a shared history of state care, resistance to authority, stigmatisation, and social exclusion. This trauma can lead to an individual becoming violent and perpetuating further harm. Although not all violent individuals join a gang, and not all gang members are violent, if violence continues to be normalised, then intergenerational patterns of violence and abuse will persist.

Negative experiences with gangs are regularly portrayed within media but little focus highlights the social harms and barriers commonly faced by gang members and their communities. These harms will continue to impact future generations and lead to continued intergenerational trauma without a change to the current perception of gangs, their whānau and how they are treated within society.

Our Future - Understanding and Collaboration

By understanding the range of harm caused and experienced within gang communities, more opportunities will be identified across government, non -government and communities to prevent harm from reoccurring in future generations.

A shift in the mindsets towards gang members, gang whānau and their communities will have the greatest future impact.

Change needs to come from within government agencies. Narratives need to be re-framed to change the perceptions that gang communities are un-deserving of help and assistance.

These communities need to be heard so together we can identify and implement achievable solutions and communities are assisted in achieving their goals.

"Start with us, and it will flow through".

A member of an adult gang's views on enabling a better future.

"Listen to our voices and help us solve problems together"

A member of an adult gang on working together