

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



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.

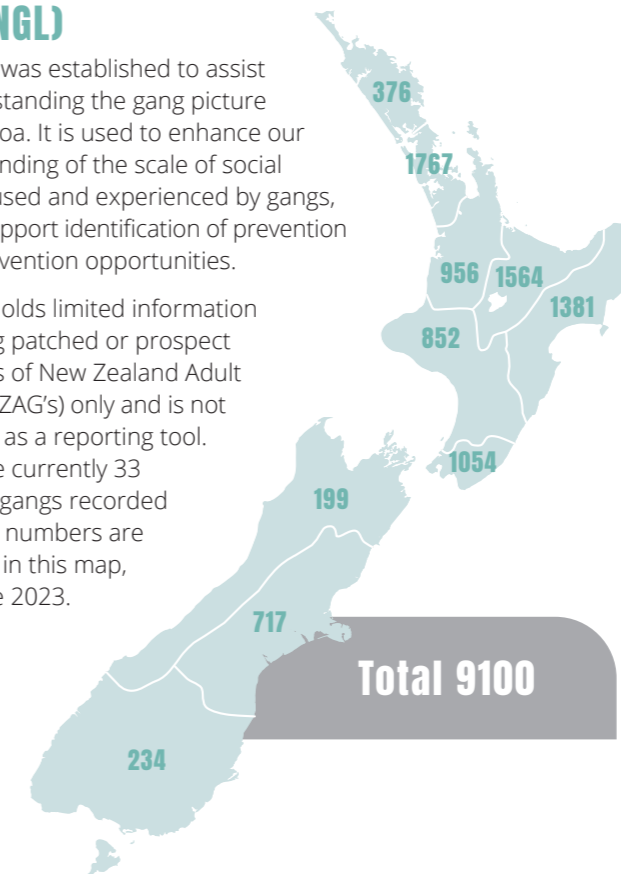


Fostering and encouraging the positive aspects of gang communities, as well as the growth of healthy behaviours and environments, to effect long term change and impact a cultural shift with gang environment towards improved well-being, outcomes, and community empowerment.

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 June 2023.



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.

The Changing Generations

The landscape of gangs in Aotearoa is changing and provides unique opportunities to support prosocial engagement within whānau and communities.

Our ageing gang population and influx of younger members has resulted in a more pronounced age-spread in gangs today, resulting in younger generations likely having more influence.

The changing landscape has enabled many chapters to shift away from harmful behaviours, such as methamphetamine use or violence, and focus on education, employment, connection to whenua, whānau, and culture. These positive behaviours have a ripple effect throughout the community that encourages others to adopt similar approaches.

However, the influence of the younger generation has also steered some members towards an approach that emphasises personal and financial gain, a 'flashy' image, and violence. It is imperative we focus on our young people to prevent and reduce harm in changing gang environment.

Our Younger Generation Youth Gangs in Aotearoa

Youth gangs are common in Aotearoa, however, only a small proportion progress to adult gangs. Youth gangs are often similar to other adolescent peer groups seeking social connection.

Many gangs are intergenerational and embedded in their communities. Often a natural part of growing up in these environments is for rangatahi to continue into these groups. In these environments, the term 'recruitment' is considered unhelpful due to the whānau and support elements that youth receive in these communities.

Why Youth Join Gangs

The drivers of youth gang membership are varied, with interdependencies across various factors. However, the drivers can be broadly grouped into three categories below:

Whānau and peers:

Youth that experience family dysfunction may seek whānau elsewhere, sometimes in gangs. However, whānau and peer influence can shape a youth's involvement in gangs.

Environmental:

Neighbourhoods and communities where gangs are common make joining a gang a normal part of life. Poverty and a disconnection from culture can also increase the likelihood of youth joining gangs.

Individual:

Experiences of youth justice and state care, trauma, and disengagement from education also increase the likelihood of youth joining gangs.

The Adolescent Brain

Many young people receive the love, care and protection needed from whānau. However, not receiving these basic needs may risk a life trajectory leading to adverse outcomes.

Harm within familial and peer environments is not unique to people in gang communities, however, young people in these communities experience a higher level of harm from family and peers than anywhere else.

It is important to note that while most parents within the gang environment desire positive outcomes for their families, some individuals are not equipped with the right tools to create and foster healthy relationships.

Harm occurs in family relationships in the form of neglect, and physical and emotional abuse, and through witnessing verbal arguments or violence between parents. Youth also experience violence in their relationships with partners, and intimidation and bullying in their relationships with peers.

Youth in gang environments were also found to have high levels of interaction with Oranga Tamariki at a young age, including being in Oranga Tamariki care. It is important to note that not all gang communities experience family harm or its impact.

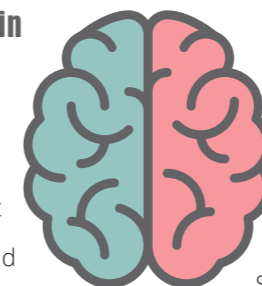
Harm caused to youth in gang environments can negatively impact different aspects to their wellbeing as highlighted through the lens of Te Whare Tapa Whā. A holistic approach to supporting youth that considers Te Whare Tapa Whā creates greater opportunity for youth to thrive in all pou, including their mental and physical health, social connectedness, and peer and whānau relationships.

Growing brains respond differently when under stress. Prolonged or repeated exposure to stress can have significant impacts on development, including anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder. This can result in difficulties regulating emotions, including violent outbursts, and may create barriers with learning and concentration.

Between the ages of approximately 12 and 14, youth experience a shift into adolescence involving one of the most significant brain developments. The interactions youth have during this time inform the types of connections made in the brain, which are carried forward into adulthood. Growing the brain through positive, supportive interactions can promote taha whānau and taha wairua, enabling youth to plan, make positive decisions, and empathise with others (Green Brain). However, when youth witness or are victims of negative behaviours, they may be forced into a stress response which is harmful to their development and hauora (Red Brain). When engaging with youth we must ensure we are creating trust and safety to encourage more positive responses.

Green Brain

Over-ride impulses
Plan
Time management
Abstract and empathy



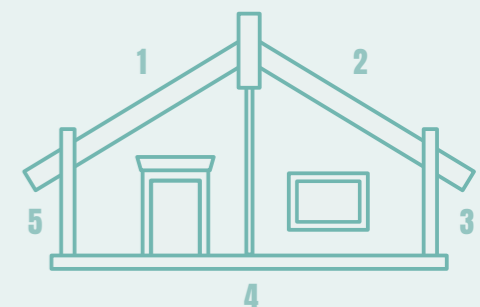
Red Brain

Survival mode
Impulsive
Irrational
Self-focused

Te Whare Tapa Whā Model

This model describes hauora (health) and well being as a whareniui, or meeting house, with four pou (walls).

These pou represent taha wairua (our spiritual wellbeing), taha hinengaro (our mental and emotional wellbeing), taha whānau (our whānau, family and social well being), and taha tinana (our physical health and well being). These are laid on a foundation of whenua (our connection to land and our roots), including the spaces where we feel comfortable, safe, and able to be ourselves.



1. Taha Wairua

Our spiritual wellbeing.

2. Taha Hinengaro

Our mental and emotional wellbeing.

3. Taha Whānau

Our whānau, family and social wellbeing.

4. Whenua

Our connection to land and our roots.

5. Taha Tinana

Our physical health and wellbeing.

When we support healthy relationships, we have a greater impact on improving youth wellbeing.