

Title:

A Peer Approach to High Risk Youth

Source:

Hritz, Susan A. and Patricia A. Gabow, MD. A Peer Approach to High Risk Youth. Journal of Adolescent Health 1997;20:259-260.

Email and Web Addresses: None.

Contact Susan A. Hritz, 3550 S. Gilpin Street, Cherry Hills, CO 80110.

Conclusion:

In Denver, the number of youth in gangs and the homicides that have been connected to gang activity has risen. The youth who are involved with gangs have a much greater risk of getting arrested, getting hurt, hurting someone else or dying. The excitement of being a member of a gang is attracting many young people who connect the lifestyle with power, money, drugs, sex and respect.

The GRASP program uses a peer approach that has been successful in other areas of substance abuse prevention and intervention. They closely follow the AA philosophy in using recovering members or former gang members to lead support groups. The program has helped the 90 GRASP members that are both male and female by offering a positive support outside of the gang that many of these young people need. A study of the program proved that the youth were more likely to stay in school, not become injured, and to generally stay out of trouble.

Purpose:

Two young ex-gang members started an organization in 1991 called GRASP. It is the Gang Rescue and Support Project of Denver. The organization uses small group meetings, mentoring and awareness programs to discourage gang involvement. The program uses a youth to youth approach that is comprehensive. New members who are volunteers attend the weekly meetings that are similar to AA support groups. The meetings begin with selecting a youth member to run the group and with a moment of silence to remember victims of gang violence. The large group is then divided into smaller groups that are hosted by core members. Those are members who are no longer involved in violence and live a more positive life outside of the gangs. Every participant discusses his previous week and his personal values and thoughts about being in or wanting to join a gang. Role-plays are used to make members understand what victims go through. A mentor is paired with each new member that serves as a support through out the week. Adult volunteers serve as advisory members who help in the areas of education, crisis intervention and legal issues. Core members travel the community conducting gang awareness presentations.

Findings:

GRASP is a promising intervention for young people that may be involved with gang activity. More evaluation needs to be completed. A very small group of members were surveyed with pre and post- tests. The survey was self- reporting and did not follow the youth for a significant amount of time to be able to find trends or other information that could help stop youth violence.

The overall evaluation did show that the youth involved with the GRASP program were more likely to stay in school, not become injured, and to generally stay out of trouble.

**Implications for Prevention:**

Even though this is an intervention program that focuses on the AA model of treatment, it has lessons to be learned for any youth program. The program allows youth to assume leadership roles and make decisions with the support of an adult advisory group. Peer, or youth to youth involvement adds validation and reality to the experiences that youth share in an honest way.

Summary Provided By: Kathy Paxton