

Chapter 3

YOUTH GANG/GROUP ACTIVITIES

"If I wanted a gun today I could go get one. I could walk in through the school and find a gun. I may not get it today but I'd have it tomorrow."

(Steve, 17)

- **Illegal Activities**

The activities of youth gangs/groups are as varied as their types and range from petty theft to robbery, assault, and, though rare, murder. The more serious illegal activities appear to be primarily the domain of more organized gangs/groups though a "group of friends" can cross the line and move from mischief to serious crimes of violence and property offences. The majority of offences appear to be property offences.

You know, like one guy (in the gang) sells hash, one guy sells weed, one guy sells crack ... one guy just breaks into cars. Like usually a lot of stuff goes on.

(Tim, 16)

It depends on the people who are in it. Murders ... armed robberies ... muggings, shooting. Other gangs are into petty theft, you know rolling kids for shoes ... hats, jackets. Some gangs are just straight into drug dealing. Thirty per cent of the gangs are probably into the heavy stuff. Those are the really hard core, you know, "We don't care if we die by a cop's bullet. We don't care if we're in jail for life. We're right into this."

(Bill, 21)

Stealing cars, breaking into houses. One guy burned down this new house. Gang fights ... shoot outs ... breaking into stores.

(foe, 14)

Robberies, B&E's, car thefts ... {selling} drugs. A lot of people in my area want to do drive-by's. They've got the guns. They've got the power. They've got the cars.

{Danny, 15)

Drugs for sure, even in home room I see some guys passing weed or whatever you want to buy even in home room classes. Hash, weed, yeah in home room. It's so easy to do in class. Why wait if you can get it right there and now.

(Gary, 16)

- **Weapons**

The presence of weapons, and indeed an increase in the use of weapons, has become a more predominant feature of youth gang/group conflict in recent years according to the youth interviewed. They believe that possibly a majority of all young people in school carry some form of weapon with them, typically a pocket knife. Knives appear to be the weapon of choice because they are easy to conceal and obtain. The reason most young people carry knives is out of a perceived need to protect themselves in case they are threatened or assaulted by other youth or gangs/groups.

Weapons used range from crude homemade knives fashioned from "exacto knife" blades to billiard balls in a sock, automatic weapons, and explosives. Guns are apparently easy to obtain and as a weapon carry the greatest status. Guns can be purchased illegally "on spec" from underground local suppliers, though most appear to come from parents' or friends' homes and burglaries. There appears to be a strong connection between the rise in the sale of drugs, particularly crack and cocaine, and the presence of high-powered guns and automatic weapons.

31

Find out who's dad goes out hunting. You find some kid who is not part of the gang who wishes to be part of the gang or looks up to you or you know from class, go to his house, pretend like you are going to do homework for him (then) pocket a gun. Throw a rifle out the back window or whatever from the basement. One of your friends will run by and pick it up. You can buy bullets at Canadian Tire, you can buy (them) just about anywhere.

{Bill, 21)

A lot of young people my age carry guns and they'll use them too. Nine out of ten people carry knives with them you know, and if not knives some other sort of weaponry. Guns (are) cheap and easy to get.

{Tim, 16)

Weapons right down from (an) "Uzi" to a finger nail file and (everything) in between. You've got guns, knives, swords, smoke bombs, chains, bicycle chains, lead pipes, wires, pool balls, shot put balls, whips.

(Joe, 14)

- Drugs

Drugs were not a major part of the youth gang/group phenomenon when it first emerged in its present manifestation in the late 1980's. However, this appears to have changed over the past several years. The social consumption of drugs, theft and robbery to obtain money to buy drugs, and dealing drugs for profit are becoming a central feature of much gang/group activity. A lot of this drug activity appears to be centred in and around schools.

The emergence of the trade in crack cocaine, especially in Toronto, has apparently brought with it an increase in the use of guns, lethal violence, and fights over "territory".

The weed business and the hash business that's like used to be my areas main thing. Now the kids want to sell crack. A lot of kids want to do armed robberies now 'cause they know that they're just (going to get) away with it. Most of them haven't even been charged before so if they do an armed robbery they're going to be let go. Most of my friends that I do crime with do it for the rush or do it to buy drugs, money for drugs, to sell drugs.

{Danny, 15)

- How Gang/Group Members See Their Illegal Activities

It is common for gang/group members to see their illegal activities only in terms of material gain. The fact that it is illegal is really not a consideration nor a sufficient deterrent. After some time of being involved in a gang/group or living in a community or neighbourhood with a "gang culture", crime just becomes part of the lifestyle, an occupation or livelihood. Under these circumstances individual members rarely have an opportunity to question their behaviour since neighbourhood gang/group norms are strong and there is a great deal of pressure to conform. A youth risks ostracization and sometimes physical harm for challenging the status quo.

Involvement in illegal activity meets a number of needs for gang/group members. Some commit crimes as a way to meet immediate survival needs for food and to prove they can take care of themselves. Others see it as a means to achieve the good life and meet status needs such as the desire to have fashionable clothes, jewellery, and obtain

prestige among peers. Receiving pleasure from the "spoils" of crime, recognition from peers, and affirmation of one's criminal skills is powerfully reinforcing.

(It's) an everyday part of life. Some of my friends, you know, they're only like 16, 17, but if they don't wake up in the morning and steal something then they don't eat. Like that's how it is. (They also) like to get clothes and stuff. Everybody wants to have all sorts of jewellery and stuff

{Tim, 16)

32

If they didn't get busted or anything ... they see it as a victory. If they can take care of themselves they see it as a victory.

(Mary, 17)

As much as it might not be worth it for (a) particular person because they're always in and out of jail...when they're out they've got new stuff and good stuff. It's just attractive. You get the best looking girlfriends and the whole shabang. It's like your job if you know what I mean. Your play is hanging out with the boys and partying and drinking beer, and your job when you're not doing that is crime~ you know~ 'cause everybody wants to have money. You're job is crime.

(Brad, 19)

It's...a way of making money. I can make more money in two days than people make in two months.

(Wayne, 18)

• Involvement in Illegal Gang/Group Activity Is Fun

One of the most worrisome aspects of gang/group involvement, and one of the most difficult for adults and victims to understand, is the excitement that can come with involvement in criminal behaviour, the elation of "getting away with it") and the excitement over breaking social taboos. This aspect of fun presents a serious challenge to youth-serving professionals to address programmatically because it is consistent with adolescent developmental needs, specifically the need to seek adventure and novel sensations and situations, limit-test, and challenge authority.

They think of it as fun, something exciting to do. Like it's an adrenaline rush. Like it's purely adrenaline for me at least, somewhat like a natural high. It's like a drug and when I used to do things illegal it used to make me feel like powerful, full of adrenaline. It was just fun to do. It was just so much fun to do that I would get off on it basically.

(David, 19)

It's a way (to have) fun. I had fun. I had a lot of fun. It's a way of living on the edge, having the thrill of getting away with a crime.

(Wayne, 18)

It's a way of escape. It's a new experience and kids are naturally curious about many things. The problem is how to get out (once you're in).

(Mary, 17)

• Fear of Getting Caught Is No Deterrent

A majority of the young people in the study considered the risk of being caught, though it was not a deterrent. A few

never really considered that being caught was even a possibility. Either way the consequences of being apprehended didn't actually sink in until it was too late. For those young people who felt they had nothing to lose, getting into trouble with the law was an expected but irrelevant consideration.

I didn't even think about (getting into trouble with the law). That aspect wasn't even in my brain at all. It never crossed my mind until it happened.

(Bill, 21)

(It's) just living on the edge. Basically ... the less you have in (life) ... the less you think about (consequences) ... the more (committed) you will be (to) the gang because you really don't care if you go to jail or not. You're not cautious about this.

(Joe, 14)

It was just fun and making money. I never really saw myself crossing the line. It was just the way

33

Life was for me. It went on for a long time. I don't know why I was never really caught by the cops until I was about 16 years old.

(Wayne, 18)

- Inter-Racial Gang/Group Conflict

The opinion of young people varied on this question, but there was a majority view that inter-racial conflict is becoming a significant part of the youth gang/group phenomenon. This is something that appears to have changed remarkably over the past few years.

However, rooted in young peoples' responses was an awareness that race may not be the central issue in many gang/group conflicts. Inter-racial gang/group conflict often starts with a perceived slight, state, bump in the hall, at a petty misunderstanding between two individuals. When those individuals gather their friends together to settle the score the clash has the appearance of an interracial gang conflict.

Nonetheless, there are indeed race-based conflicts that can be most easily observed in the clashes between minority youth and White Supremacist Skinheads. There is also inter-race conflict between, for example, Black and Asian youth.

Sometimes it's racial sometimes it's not... maybe 30% ... I don't think it's that high. Like generally it's for other reasons.

(David, 19)

(Racial tensions are) not really (a part of most gang conflicts) ... I'm speaking from experience. The gangs that I know of they ... they're Black, Black on Black and when they fight each other it's mostly for like territory. They want their own territory.

(Joe, 14)

Racism is quite a huge thing and it's building even more in all the schools. It was pretty bad around here for a while. I think it's starting to cool down a bit.

(Barry, 17)

- Gangs/Groups That Other Gangs/Groups Are Afraid Of

These gangs are characterized by their size in terms of numbers, the physical size of members, their access to and use of powerful weapons like automatic guns and explosives, a total disregard for the law, their use of violence, and the fact that they are involved in dealing large quantities of hard drugs such as cocaine, crack, and heroin.

These guys are into, you know, 12 kilos of coke type of thing. They're shipping hardware, military guns and stuff like that.

(Bill, 21)

Basically having weapons, the accessibility to the guns and knives and all that. (David, 19)

It would come down to ... two basic things, numbers and weapons. (Brad, 19)

- Opinions About The Young Offenders Act

Some young people feel the Y.O.A. is beneficial for them, helping them to acknowledge their criminal behaviour and giving them an opportunity to turn their lives around. The majority view is that the Y.O.A. is too lenient on first-time offenders and on those who commit violent offences involving the use of weapons.

34

It is apparent from the interviews that the young people have some erroneous impressions about the Young Offenders Act. Some are aware of the legal process that young offenders face because of their experiences with the legal system. However, none possess a real knowledge of the legislation or an understanding of the spirit of its intention. Some feel the Y.O.A. will not benefit young people committed to a lifestyle of crime because they will exploit certain provisions. A few argue for making all young people more aware of the Y.O.A. so they might avoid the consequences of getting into trouble with the law.

Like some people I wouldn't care if I killed them 'cause like I get charged as a young offender and I will be in and out like that (snaps fingers). I'll do like maybe four years. Jail is a joke. A lot of people have that attitude, you know, well I'm young (so) if I rob a bank I'll get like 50 grand, I'll do maybe two years. And people think well that's all right because I couldn't make 50 grand in two years. Like the Young Offenders Act is like nothing. Everybody knows it's a joke. Like being a young offender the only thing that would really suck if you did a robbery and got caught is if you didn't stash the cash.

(Tim, 16)

No one understands what jail is about unless you've been there. When I got out of jail everyone said, "Oh wow, hey, how are you doing?" They thought it was cool that I went to jail so they thought they would be cool and try and hang around me. If they understood what the Young Offenders Act was about maybe they would understand some of the charges. There's a lot of things I don't understand about the legal system. A 14 year old kid would know even less than I would and that's not enough to know.

(Barry, 17)

I don't think (most kids) actually know the (Y.O.A.) itself but I think they have an impression. Most kids know that if they're going to get caught for a crime that generally they're not going to be punished (and) if they do get punished it's not going to be that harsh. It's not going to be that harsh because ... they're under the age of eighteen. In the gangs generally the age range would be between 18 and under all the way down to, I think our youngest was ten, nine ... sometimes maybe a little bit younger.

(David, 19)

When you look at the Young Offenders Act in a way it's really good because it gives you a second chance. In another way there are the kind of young people who have their mind set ... about how they are going to (live) their life. They know they know they are going to be in the gang forever. They know they are going to do crime until they die and the Young Offenders Act is not really helping those people. Just three or five years for killing somebody, you're just going to think well will do my time and then get out and do it again because it doesn't seem like a long time for murder. It was really good for me because I didn't need that much of a punishment to change my mind about how my life was going, but a lot of people need (more serious) punishment.

(Wayne, 18)

- How Serious Youth Gang/Group Activity Can Get

Few adults or other young people understand just how dangerous involvement in youth gangs/groups can be. Young people start off generally naive about the potential risks involved in gang/group activity and typically lack the cognitive skills and sophistication to recognize the peer, situational, or other factors that can influence their behaviour. Since many gangs/groups "drift" into escalating levels of crime or violence, the gradual increments are not serious enough to recognize until it is too late.

I came about an inch and a half from death (shows slash mark across head and face). This was a blind swing by this guy and it could have been my throat. He tried to have me killed at a dance a little while later.

(Brad, 19)

35

I know why I got shot. I got shot because of a knife fight that happened in the park earlier. We were walking through the park at the wrong time. Ever since I got shot you know like ... I never had no problems with nobody really before. I would go anywhere I wanted and pretty well do anything I want and like before everything was just a fair fight. Then I realized it's come down to life or death sometimes.

(Tim, 16)

- Leaving A Gang/Group

For some young people the process of leaving a gang/group can be as simple as not showing up anymore. For others it can be an ordeal and involve attempts on their lives and threats to their families. Either way it is typically viewed as a difficult process. Even when the young person does not receive threats or actual beatings, the process of leaving usually means abandoning a circle of friends and acquaintances who have supplied social and emotional support, friendship, and good times often in difficult personal periods of the youth's life.

Many have been friends with their gang/group associates for a long time and find it difficult to break the emotional connection. The gang/group also provides structure and order for some youth whose lives are chaotic and out of control. Exiting the gang/group would leave these youth extremely vulnerable and ungrounded.

I was constantly worried that somebody ... might get to me ... or another gang might come after us. I knew what it was like when I was in it so when I tried to get out of it I was afraid of that. I was scared to death when I got out. (When I left the gang) I had people driving by the house firing shotguns in the air, obscene phone calls in the middle of the night. I was threatened with, "If you say anything to anybody we're going to kill you and we're going to kill your family."

(David, 19)

(A young person gets out of a gang) only if he is dead or very, very lucky ... or if he goes to a different country. I'm not that afraid now ... as I was six months after I left the gang or during when I was in the gang. People I know (outside the gang) are somewhat more normal. It's emotionally very hard to get out and be released from the crowd that you were in because if you feel low or you don't have anywhere to stay or if you are broke ... I mean I start wondering whether to go back. Sometimes you need some kind of protection and you don't have anywhere to go.

(Mary, 17)

It's really hard (to leave). Because when you're in a gang those are the people you see all the time. You spend all your time with those people and once you have been with a group of people for so long it's really hard to leave. You have to become a totally different person to leave that group. You have to totally change your mind about your way of life. It's really hard.

(Wayne, 18)

• The Personal Consequences Of Youth Gang/Group Involvement

Most young people interviewed in the study expressed regret and sometimes great sadness about how their personal lives had changed as a result of their involvement in gangs/groups and criminal behaviour.

I stick out now. People look at me and they know who I am. Police still think I'm part of (a gang). (I'm) looked upon differently. Sa' J was standing there and there was a robbery and some other kids who pulled the robbery (but) who never had a criminal record before (were) standing there too, the police would come up and question me first. (The police) know that I've been in trouble and they know the people I used to hang around with. It's not worth it.

(Bill, 21)

It's very hard to trust people after (you've been in a gang). I mean you trusted so much you just

36

don't know who to trust anymore and it can be very scary at times because you feel alone. You don't have anyone to trust but (yourself) so you get drunk or something.

(Mary, 17)

I've learned a lot about myself and people around me and self-respect for myself and others and to treat other people like a human being and not as a piece of meat ... you could go just beat up. I never thought about other people as having feelings. I just thought of another person as a thing or an object ... we could go up (to) and beat the crap out of ... not even thinking about it and not thinking about that person hurting or suffering from it. I've just learned about life in general and realized what it's all about and it's not about gangs and money and power and violence. It's about life and living it and enjoying it and not being worried about things all the time.

(David, 19)

I just reached a point where I just said, "You know, this is my life ... crime and fights and all that." Once it got brought to the extreme (of nearly being killed) that's the final thing, when you get into having to kill people or have them kill you. You know it doesn't go any further than that. I just took a look at it and said, "Is it worth (it)? Do I want to sacrifice the next 25 years of my life over this meathead. The guy is scum and somebody else will probably kill him in the next couple of years anyway, so do I want to sacrifice my life ... over this guy?" If someone screws it to you have to screw them back. But it just got to the point where I just said, "No. I'm sick of it. I can't do it no more. I'm sick of it man."

(Brad, 19)

Chapter 4

HOW TO RESPOND: SOME

SUGGESTIONS FROM YOUTH GANG/GROUP MEMBERS

"The perfect time to get out is the first time you get scared or charged. It's the best way." (Bill, 21)

Young people were asked to share their thoughts and feelings about how we as a society should respond to the phenomenon of youth gangs/groups. Their responses are characterized by a strong need to feel valued, respected, and connected to schools, families, and communities. Permeating the responses is a desire for real relationship with trusted adults and peers .

- **Suppressing Gangs/Groups & Prohibiting Gang/Group Formation**

Young peoples' responses to questions about prohibiting or suppressing youth gangs/groups or youth violence reflect both pessimism and optimism. Virtually all youth feel we need to try because the situation is becoming quite serious in their opinion. However, most doubt it is possible to prevent youth gangs/groups from forming or eliminate them. One youth feels that we should not do anything as young people will eventually just grow out of it.

It's not something that can be stopped. It's going to take a long time. It can't be stopped right now. (Wayne, 18)

I think that groups or gangs are like at one time or another they're just going to split up and go their own way and they're going to go on with their lives. It's like a pit stop in life. I don't think it should be stopped. I think it's a very positive thing but there are also groups where it's not very positive, where they're pushing people into hard core drugs and crack and heroin.

(Steve, 17)

(Gangs) should be stopped in any possible way. The situation is bad. Too many kids are getting killed. Too many are killing themselves just so they'd be out.

(Mary, 17)

- **Police**

Young people in youth gangs/groups, especially those involved in criminal activity, inevitably come into contact with the police. For most this contact brings an abrupt end to their intense and exciting lifestyles, and to much of their freedom. Not surprisingly, many of the youth report that their experiences with law enforcement officers and the legal system were less than positive.

However, many youth acknowledge that getting caught was a relief and brought them to a place where they could begin getting their lives back together. Some are able to speak with empathy about the difficulty and dangerousness of being a law enforcement officer. These youth see how both their lives are intertwined in a social arena characterized by uncertainty, fear, and volatility.

When asked how police could best respond to the phenomenon of youth gangs/groups, most respond by placing great emphasis on the human relationship between the police officer and young persons. Mutual respect is highlighted by most as the fundamental core to any relationship between police and youth gang/group members. Mutual respect would appear to be at the heart of creating a communication bridge and a margin of safety to nurture

dialogue.

I know some cops from around the neighbourhood, you know, they're doing their job and everything but they're like cool with the people. With the cops like I can see where they're coming (from). After I got shot I can see a lot of things now (like) how come the police are so rough with

39

all these people ... because like they have ... guns and you know if somebody moves the wrong way, you know, then (the police are) scared themselves because they don't know this guy. They don't know what he's going to do.

(Tim, 16)

(Police should) start communicating with young people in a way that the cops are showing respect toward young people, then they are going to get more respect from young people. That is a really good way to do it. Getting involved with communities, actually working with the people not just cruising around in the cars.

(Wayne, 18)

Some cops are cool. You know, like some cops ... they sit there, you can sit in the car with them, talk you know, just joke around with them ... nothing to do with crime, nothing at all, just joking, like it (was your) uncle. Some cops are like that you know.

(Danny, 15)

• Schools

Schools in Canada are a major focal point for young peoples' social life and a forum for youth gang/group conflict and youth violence. Given the large number of youth present in most schools conflicts appear inevitable.

The young people feel that schools should play both a reactive and proactive role in responding to youth gangs/groups. Some feel that schools can play an important role in preventing gang/formation or gang/group conflict, especially between youth from different cultural groups, by providing cultural sensitivity training and opportunities for different groups to interact more. Several youth also identify a need for schools to focus on the protection and safety of the non-offending majority of students.

One young person encourages educators not to be judgmental and to try and see the desperate situation of youth gang/group members from the young person's point of view. Some feel schools should provide students with information about the legal and other consequences of gang/group involvement,

They have to do what they can do to protect the (non-offending) other kids in school. (Barry, 17)

If you are a guidance counsellor make sure you help the kid and look at the situation from his point of view not from yours. Many guidance counsellors (tell) you, "You have to get out (of the gang), you have to get out. You don't know how to get out. You know that it's bad for you but you don't have a choice.

(Mary, 17)

Education is an important thing. You have to get to young people before they start getting into gangs. Telling kids and educating them about what goes on and what the consequences (are) and tell them where gang bangers end up. It has to be done before they get to that age where they start joining gangs. Schools could have a lot of programs of getting the students together to get to know each other because there are a lot of different (racial) groups in schools. If they could get these different kids together to know each other because usually they don't. If these people in the school get to know each other ... it's going to cut down on the amount of violence and stuff That could ease down the troubles

between them.

(Wayne, 18)

40

- Social Services

Few young people have any knowledge of or previous experience with social services but do provide a few suggestions. The prevention of gang/group involvement by resourcing homeless youth, and coordinating services for high needs youth are mentioned. Again, the importance of relationship, trust, and mutual respect is highlighted.

There are a lot of kids who are homeless and stuff like that and they get into gangs. If they have places for them to go to when they don't have a place to sleep instead of that kid going and joining a gang he or she can be helped by those agencies. That would really cut down on the number of people joining gangs which would cut down on gangs.

(Wayne, 18)

If they need help in rehabilitation, well set that up for them. If they need to just talk to somebody, talk to them as a person. If they need education set them up with a school. Help a person rather than saying, "Well this is the textbook, this is what we have to do, this is what you have to do, this is what I have to do." Rather than (acting like) a professional (or on) a business level, have a more person to person (relationship).

(David, 19)

They can make sure those kids trust them and in some cases not to be so formal with them. Those kids don't have anyone but the gang and the social workers. (Social workers) should make sure that those kids trust them very much so they can open up and ... accept some help from them and ... prove that there's somebody who is looking over them and wanting to help them and understand what they are going through.

(Mary, 17)

- Government

It was to questions about the potential role for government that young people gave their most strongly worded responses. Many feel that government is out of touch with youth and totally unaware of the seriousness of youth gang/group phenomenon. Their frustration over high youth unemployment and an uncertain future is strongly evident.

Several young people want government to take a stronger stand on violent offenders and weapons offences, make more resources available for law enforcement, and stop the flow of weapons into the country and ultimately the hands of young people. Some youth feel there is a need to resource families more so they can provide better care for their children. Others feel that the government should play a central role in educating the public, parents, teachers, and youth-serving professionals about the presence and dangers of youth gangs/groups.

If I stop selling drugs are you going to give me the two hundred bucks a day I could be making? The government (needs to make) more job opportunities. Like there's no jobs out there, like unless you want to work at McDonalds and nobody really wants to work at McDonalds. Like a lot of people say like open more community centres and that but I don't know if too many people will go to the community centres anyway. (Maybe) if the penalties were more stiffer. Say you get into a scrap and as soon as you throw that punch you get an automatic certain amount of time. If you get convicted on it then that would stop a lot of fights. Say you got a year for fighting. Then a lot of people are going to say, "This guy ain't worth a year." I think that for like weapons and stuff there should be more serious (penalties). If you get caught with a gun, you know, I think it should be an automatic two years, like if the gun had no bullets. If the gun has...bullets you add on more time. (Tim, 16)

Governments aren't aware as much as they think they are. They think they know everything that's going on ... with gangs. There's a lot of people out there that governments don't know anything about. If there wasn't so much disrespect for gang members and they would treat them as normal

41

people and look past their appearance, then I think (things) would be a lot better. There would be a lower crime rate.

(Barry, 17)

We need more people aware of (gangs). A lot of parents would not know what the signs are, what to look for. A lot of teachers don't know what to look for. We need education. Not only in schools but in general everywhere. Education in all aspects, in court systems, with social services, in therapy situations, school situations, police. Everything, basically in every aspect that's dealing with children or kids or even parents that have children. Educate them.

(David, 19)

Assist...families that don't have very much money because kids are more likely to look for some other financial assistance. Limit the weapon supply in the country. Bring more cops to ensure that the kids are not in danger at least not while they are in school.

(Mary, 17)

- Parents

Parents were identified as perhaps the single most important factor in preventing or suppressing youth gangs/groups. An overwhelming number of responses point to the need for more and better communication, relationship, trust, respect between parents and youth, and real involvement on the part of parents in their children's lives.

The best way I can say it is like my dad does with us. He's our dad and everything but sometimes he'll sit us down and be more like a friend. Like he'll say, "Listen, I know this is going on and I know this is going on." (Parents need) to be like cool with their kids and try and understand what's going on and why they're doing certain things. A lot of people like their parents believe every single word that (they) say. Like it's good to believe what your kids say but you've got to know if they're shitting you or not. The kid comes home with 20 VCR's in boxes and he says he bought them. You've got to know there's something wrong here with your son or your daughter. Parents just have got to smarten up and realize what's going on.

(Tim, 16)

That's the key, that's what it all comes down to. Everything comes down to respect. They don't get the respect they want (from parents) so they will go out and rip something off to say, "Look, look at the attention I'm getting now. Am I going to get respect now?" That's what it all boils down to. (Kids) want attention and they want respect.

(Barry, 17)

Parents should be understanding, sympathetic. Like, talk to your kids. Sit down (and) say, "Look, I understand what you're going through. I hear about these things. What can I do to help? What do you need me to do? I'm here for you. I love you a lot. I care for you. Just being very supportive of children. Punishment generally doesn't help. Punishment usually ends up in rebellion ... either the kid against the parent or the kid against society. If people helped the kids then the kids would generally be more willing to help themselves.

(David, 19)

- What Does The Future Look Like

Young people speak with genuine fear and concern about the future of our society if we do not take steps to address youth gangs/groups and youth violence. Most feel that the phenomenon in Canadian towns and cities will end up resembling the situation in Los Angeles.

A lot of people are carrying guns now and more people are going to start carrying guns. The younger people that grow up they're going to be the worst because ... they see all these older people carrying guns so they're going to want to be "badder" ... so they're going to start carrying

42

guns ... except it won't be hand guns. (Tim, 16)

If they don't stop it soon the gangs are going to grow and people are going to be killed because everyone thinks it's cool to carry a gun. Everyone thinks it makes them bigger than they actually are. People are going to get really hurt.

(Barry, 17)

I totally don't think the city is going to get any better. That is my honest opinion. It is only going to get worse because the younger kids are worse than the older kids and they're only going to get older. They're just going to get older and more severe.

(Brad, 19)

- The Last Word

If I was going to say something about youth gangs right now to people who were thinking about getting into a gang I'd say, "Learn, learn what it's about from people who have been in it. Don't get involved in gangs because it leads to more problems than it's worth. You have a choice. Don't start it because it's a long, long process especially with the legal system. If you get screwed with the legal system it's a long process." I had to go through seven months of ... to get my court cases remanded, missing a lot of time off school. My marks dropped. It was just amazing. You wouldn't believe how much my marks dropped with missing classes. The only thing that I've got to say is just mellow out and hang around with your friends. Don't get so caught up over popularity. It'll come. People who get caught up over popularity are usually people that aren't popular. People who are just acting themselves, (who) mellow out, (who) talk to people they're usually the ones that are more popular. That's all I've got to say.

(Barry, 17)

43