The Social Determinants of Native Youth Gang Involvement

By Ross VeLure Roholt, Katie Johnston-Goodstar, and Don Eubanks

One-size-fits-all methods to reducing gang involvement are rarely successful. Instead, an approach that addresses a community's issues, history, and experience are increasingly supported by scholarship and practice.

Abstract: *While youth gang involvement nationally is believed to be on the rise, few policies and services are in place to address this issue, leaving primary responsibility to law enforcement. The focus of such responses shift quickly to deterrence and suppression strategies, tactics aimed at reducing crimes committed by gangs. These strategies alone are typically unsuccessful. This article describes a community-based participatory research project investigating the presence and activities of youth gangs in one Native American tribal community in the Midwest. Findings regarding demographics, law enforcement, community perceptions, school and student perceptions, and community resources are presented.*

Analysis reveals evidence that gang involvement should be seen not only as a result of risk and protective factors in the lives of young people but also as a youth response to multiple, pervasive social factors, including poverty, historical trauma, and continuing racism—what we are beginning to name "social determinants" of youth gang activity. We include recommendations for youth and community response to social determinants.

Youth gang involvement remains a persistent problem for many communities in the United States. The National Youth Gang Survey in 2010 found one-third of U.S. cities, towns, and rural communities reporting gang problems.[1] In Minnesota, most youth gang activity is located within the Twin Cities urban center, although youth gangs can be found in every region of the state. While many Minnesota communities report problems and issues with youth gangs, rarely do they agree on a common definition of youth gangs. The lack of an agreed-upon definition has implications for research and data collection, but it does not

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[1] A. Egley Jr., and J.C. Howell, *Highlights of the 2010 National Youth Gang Survey* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2012).

matter much to community members who experience their neighborhood as no longer safe for themselves or their families.

With few services or policies addressing the emergence and presence of youth gangs, focus quickly shifts to law enforcement strategies of deterrence and suppression, thereby limiting responses to the reduction of youth criminal activity. Such strategies often have unintended consequences and mixed results in reducing youth gang activity.[2] Several studies discuss how suppression strategies often alienate, marginalize, and criminalize young people, creating a culture of punitive social control.[3] These tactics reinforce and exacerbate young people's disengagement from social institutions and the larger community, which has been connected to reinforcing youth gang formation and sustentation.[4] A more comprehensive approach to youth gang involvement has increasingly become supported in scholarship and practice. Rather than a one-size-fits-all method to reduce or prevent gang involvement,[2] successful approaches must be context-specific and address a community's issues, history, and experience. Approaches may combine elements of prevention, intervention, and suppression, based on a particular community's needs.[5]

Youth participation in gang activities is multifaceted and complex and requires a culturally aware approach. The literature on Native American youth gang involvement indicated that a comprehensive assessment also requires an exploration of the contemporary conditions of their everyday lives, as well as the historical trauma experienced by Native American communities.

Native American youth experience significant challenges and adversity across their life spans. Disparities exist in levels of poverty, environmental injustice, substance abuse, institutionalized stereotyping and racism, school performance, and physical health. More than one-fourth of American Indian/

Alaskan Native (AI/AN) youth live below the poverty line. Injuries and violence account for 75% of all deaths among Native Americans ages 1 to 19.[6] Substance abuse is of particular concern; indigenous youth use disproportionately high quantities of controlled and illegal substances.[7] AI/AN adolescents "have the highest suicide rate of all ethnic groups in the United States, and suicide is the second leading cause of death [for Native youth]."[8] Limited physical activity and poor dietary intake contribute to high rates of obesity for indigenous youth; national studies have found 39% of Native children are overweight or obese.[9]

In addition to contemporary conditions, Native American youth also carry a distinct legacy of historical trauma and must confront its intergenerational effects. We explored historical trauma as it is experienced by tribal youth and its relation to gang participation. Trauma is derived from multiple historical events.

▶ In the 1800s, the federal government began to pursue policies of assimilation by outlawing indigenous spiritual practices and implementing an extensive system of boarding schools, maintained despite widespread allegations of physical and sexual abuse. By the 1930s, these policies had removed 75% of Native American sacred sites from their care and jurisdiction.[10]

▶ In 1958, the Child Welfare League of America, in collaboration with the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the U.S. Children's Bureau, began administering the American Indian Adoption

Project. In the two decades that followed, a conservative estimate states that 25% to 35% of Native American children were temporarily removed from or adopted out of their biological homes.

▶ The U.S. government, researchers, and social workers have also been involved in medical experimentation on Native peoples and the coercive sterilization of Native American women estimated to have affected upwards of 40% of Native women of childbearing age in the 1970s.[11]

While many of these policies have changed, we found that interactions between tribal members and surrounding communities show evidence of continuing biases against tribal communities, and tribal youth still face hostile relationships with the state and surrounding communities, which are risk factors for youth involvement in gang activity.[12] How young people are seen and treated matters.

We also included an exploration of Native youth strengths and protective factors. Despite centuries of oppression resulting in the loss of language and culture, Native youth and communities have exhibited incredible resilience. Participating in everyday tribal ways of life and teaching indigenous languages have been shown to be protective factors.[10] We know from our interviews, as well as personal and professional experience, that Native youth are full of potential. They have caring communities; spiritual, cultural, educational, and tribal organizations committed to their success; and unique opportunities to engage in cutting-edge Native youth work practices such as youth media, environmental activism, and language preservation. We therefore identified specific community resources for tribal youth and attempted to understand the protective role they play. As a result of this assessment, we believe it is important to consider broader social and environmental factors related to historical trauma and continuing discriminatory

[2] R. Chaskin (ed.), *Youth Gangs and Community Intervention: Research, Practice, and Evidence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

[3] V. Rios, *Punished: Policing the Lives of Black and Latino Boys* (New York: New York University Press, 2011).

[4] C. Glesmann, B. Krisberg, and S. Marchionna, "Youth in Gangs: Who Is at Risk?" *Focus: Views from the National Council on Crime and Delinquency*, 2009.

[5] J.C. Howell, *Preventing and Reducing Juvenile Delinquency: A Comprehensive Framework.* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2003).

[6] J. Myers, T. Campbell, and N. Lim, "Strengthening the Spirit of Our Future: 2008 Community Assessment Report on Risks and Protective Factors for Native Youth in Sonoma, Lake and Mendocino Counties," *Activating Native Youth Assets*, 2008, accessed at www.nijc.org/pdfs /CEY%20Report%20Web-Final.pdf.

[7] M. Walls, "Marijuana and Alcohol Use During Early Adolescence: Gender Differences Among American Indian/First Nations Youth, *Journal of Drug Issues* 38,4 (2008): 1139-1160.

[8] I. Wagman Borowsky, M. Resnick, M. Ireland, and R.W. Blum, "Suicide Attempts Among American Indian and Alaska Native Youth Risk and Protective Factors," *Archives Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine* 153,6 (1999): 573.

[9] M. Sarche and P. Spicer, "Poverty and Health Disparities for American Indian and Alaskan Native Children: Current Knowledge and Future Prospects," *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1136 (2008): 126-136.

[10] W. LaDuke, *Recovering the Sacred: The Power of Naming and Claiming* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: South End Press, 2005).

[11] T. Evans-Campbell and K.L. Walters, "Catching Our Breath: A Decolonization Framework for Healing Indigenous Families," in R. Fong and R. McRoy (eds.), *Intersecting Child Welfare, Substance Abuse, and Family Violence: Culturally Competent Approaches* (Alexandria: CSWE Publications, 2006), pp. 266-290.

[12] W.A. Pridemore, "Review of the Literature on Risk and Protective Factors of Offending Among Native Americans," *Journal of Ethnicity and Criminal Justice* 2,4 (2004): 45-63.

The Latin Disciples handshake.

policies that influence the development of young people.

Conducted with support of a tribal advisory board, data gathering and analysis resulted in several preliminary recommendations for youth gang prevention and the promotion of healthy youth development. Recommendations range from continuing to support existing culturally relevant youth programming to concerns with policies and media messages that debase and threaten the healthy development of young people. We end with a primary framing question:

Are racism and inequality driving forces behind Native youth gang involvement?

While we do not ignore decisions by young people to become involved in gang activity, here we focus on the social and political determinants of their involvement.

Research Methodology

We began this community-based participatory research (CBPR) project in 2011 in collaboration with a tribal government concerned with what it perceived to be rising youth gang activity within the tribal community. The project continued through meetings with a tribal research advisory board, resulting in a final

memorandum of research between the tribe and the University of Minnesota. In this agreement, decisions are made in partnership on what questions to ask, what data to analyze, and how results are presented. Our intent was to prevent typical ways research has been conducted by universities in Indian country. These typical practices involve researchers arriving with predetermined research designs to take genetic samples, knowledge, or "data,"[13] with Native peoples being "treated as scientific objects with scant regard to community needs or the potentially harmful implications of research processes and findings."[14]

Using a mixed methods approach, we generally followed the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) Youth Gang Assessment

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[13] P Cochran, C. Marshall, C. Garcia-Downing, E. Kendell, D. Cook, L. McCubbin, and R.M. Gover. "Indigenous Ways of Knowing: Implications for Participatory Research and Community," *American Journal of Public Health* 98,1 (2008): 22-27.

[14] K. Walters, A. Stately, T. Evans-Campbell, J. Simoni, B. Duran, K. Schultz, E. Stanley, C. Charles, and D. Guerrero, "'Indigenist' Collaborative Research Efforts in Native American Communities," in A.R. Stiffman (ed.), *The Field Research Survival Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 148.

Guide.[15] While this guide provided a useful strategy and outlined important foci, our experience also disclosed its limitations, particularly the need to make it more culturally appropriate. This assessment gathers data on five domains:

1. community demographics
2. law enforcement data
3. school environments and experiences data
4. community perceptions
5. community resources

For each domain, different methods of data collection were utilized. *Community demographics* included census data, tribal community demographic information, and informational interviews conducted with Native community members. Developing an understanding of the characteristics of local youth gangs required reviewing and gathering *law enforcement data*, as well as interviewing local police officers and Native community members and participating in ride-alongs with tribal police officers.

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[15] (OJJDP) Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, "Comprehensive Gang Model: A Guide to Assessing Your Community Youth Gang Problem" (Washington, D.C.: OJJDP, 2009).

School environments and experiences data was easiest to gather as many questions in the assessment overlapped with those on the publicly available statewide student survey conducted by the Department of Education every three years, which we supplemented with school personnel interviews. In addition, we participated in a youth summit at the tribal school. Native *community perceptions* emerged through participation in community events and individual interviews with tribal members and tribal human service professionals, but also we reviewed mainstream and tribal media. Finally, *community resources* included a full assessment of services and programs available to young people within the Native community regardless of where they are living, observing tribal youth programs, and interviewing tribal and community youth service providers.

Findings

Findings are described in terms of the five domains of data suggested by the OJJDP Assessment Guide.

Community Demographics. In analyzing community demographics as part of this comprehensive gang assessment, one clear finding emerged: to understand Native American youth involvement in gangs, one cannot limit the assessment to a geographically bounded space such as a reservation. Our assessment revealed expansive Native community boundaries that challenge a geographical definition of "community." Tribal community boundaries have been contested and created through U.S. federal policy. Historically, that policy intentionally destroyed Native communities, often leaving them fragmented and deracinated–torn up by the roots.[16] While these practices may pose challenges for gathering demographic data as described in the community assessment, we learned that to fully understand the issue of Native youth gang involvement on the reservation, a more expansive understanding of community had to be used.

The historical formation of tribal community boundaries continues to have influence today. The community, like many other Native communities across the nation, was established with significant contention and trauma. Treaty-making, often under questionable pretense, established formal territorial boundaries. The Dawes Act successively diminished these tribal land bases. Additional acts of government outlawed tribal spirituality and mandated boarding school attendance, thus successfully chipping away at any remaining sense of identity and strength. The Indian Relocation Act of 1956 (relocating families from reservations to major metropolitan areas) and the disproportionate removal of Native children from their homes further cemented the disconnection from both land and family. As can be expected, the Native community at the center of our inquiry, and the Native community as a whole, collectively struggles with the contemporary consequences of these societal actions.

Despite these efforts, the tribal community retains a sovereign land base, including members in both reservation and urban areas (approximate total enrollment of 4,500) and is within close proximity to other non-Native communities (~70,000 Native Americans in the state of Minnesota according to the U.S. census). The Native community continues to maintain a strong affiliation with other bands of the tribe and with other Native American communities in Minnesota and surrounding states. (*Editor's Note:* The authors of this article signed a memorandum of understanding that the tribe at the center of this research would remain anonymous.)

This expansive notion of community provides support in many ways, and yet it also challenges ongoing efforts to address Native youth involvement in gangs. First, due to the fluidity of family ties and mobility across reservations, it is critical to incorporate data from urban Native community members as well as other reservations. Second, there is a strong collective identity as *Native American* (which is understandable); Native gangs do not discriminate on the basis of tribal enrollment or geographic locale; they gather around a common experience and identity of being Native American youth. Finally, the historic experience of tribes in a colonial nation must be central to the exploration of Native gangs and violence in Native communities. As Andrea Smith and Luana Ross state: "The violence of colonization is evidenced not merely in the most obvious forms of the history of massacres against indigenous peoples in the Americas, but in the continuing institutionalized forms of racism, discrimination, and housing that manifest themselves on a daily basis in the lives of Native peoples."[17]

In other words, to explore Native youth involvement in gangs is also to explore the violence of our nation.

Law Enforcement Data. We examined the perspectives and role of local and state law enforcement in preventing and suppressing gang involvement. This area of our research was particularly difficult because of several factors. First, law enforcement agencies are reluctant to cooperate with researchers, both because their data departments appear resource strapped and such analyses are expensive. Second, state law enforcement agencies, as of 2011, no longer collect information distinguishing young people known or suspected to be involved in gangs from other criminal activity. Previously, this information was tracked in the state through two separate databases, the Criminal Gang Pointer File and GangNet. A report published in 2010 provided details about the functions, efficacy, and dangers of these databases and indicated that there were significant ambiguities in accountability, accessibility, and required purging of gang data files. Limitations in the statute that created the database meant that it was unclear who was to administer and be accountable for it, who had access to the information, and whether (as the law indicated should happen) it was being properly purged of information. This led to the shutdown in 2011 of the GangNet database.

Additionally, the GangNet database, operated by a county sheriff's office, operated as a feeder database into the Gang Pointer File. It therefore used less stringent standards than the Pointer File. However, this file was used by 96 agencies statewide, meaning that it could be used to identify potential gang members. The GangNet database at the end of 2008 had nearly eight times the number of individuals listed than the Pointer File.[18] There are several other reasons to be concerned with the way these data were used:

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[16] C. Cahill, *Federal Fathers and Mothers: A Social History of the United States Indian Service, 1869-1933* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

[17] A. Smith and L. Ross, "Introduction: Native Women and State Violence," *Social Justice* 31,4 (2004): 1-7.

[18] Individuals only needed to meet 1 of the 10-point criteria to be entered into the GangNet database, versus a minimum of 3 to be entered into the Pointer File. "Evaluation of Gang Databases in Minnesota and Recommendations for Change" (Minneapolis: University of St. Thomas School of Law, 2010), p. 14.

Unfinished Native Disciples graffiti on an abandoned home.

▶ The criteria tend to enforce a "guilty by association" mentality because some criteria arguably have the potential to confuse "social ties" with "criminal purpose."

▶ Some of the criteria do not specifically address the issue of gang involvement.

▶ The criteria may allow for too much discretion to be used in regard to who is allowed to identify gang members.

These concerns demonstrate the difficulty of defining, tracking, and suppressing gang involvement. They also show the potential for abuses or unintentional neglect by law enforcement that misattributes gang involvement to young people because of loose affiliation and poor definitions of gang membership.

The literature cautions law enforcement from simply relying on suppression to address youth gang involvement. While not discounting the importance of suppression strategies to address and repress violent gang activity, as the 2012 arrests of several Native Mob gang members in Minnesota illustrates, overuse of suppression strategies can also have unintended consequences of further alienating Native young people from community institutions and

increase the likelihood of gang involvement. In our study, we encountered many arguments to justify the use of increasingly intrusive suppression strategies. While these have yet to be fully implemented, our data support a more balanced approach.

School Environments and Experiences Data. In analyzing student and school data several themes emerge. First, a majority of Native students report feeling respected by teachers and at the same time not feeling that teachers either listen or care about them. Second, statewide student survey data indicate that unlike other racial groups, Native students experience school as more dangerous than young people from other racial groups. Finally, interviews revealed a critique of both school content and pedagogy.

In analyzing the statewide student survey data, we learned that a majority of young people feel respected by their teachers in the sixth and twelfth grades. Of course, there is a difference between feeling respected among Native students (79% in sixth grade; 67% in twelfth grade) and White students (87% in sixth grade; 78% in twelfth grade). The percentage of Native students who report that "all" or "most" of their teachers show respect is just slightly higher than African Americans (74% in

sixth grade; 65% in twelfth grade), the group with the lowest percentage, but still a majority. While most students report feeling respected, this changes when they are asked if teachers or other adults at school care about them.

Here Native students report the lowest percentage. In ninth grade, only 36% of Native students report feeling cared for by teachers or other adults in school. This compares to 46% of White students and 41% of African American students. While teachers and other adults in school are seen as being respectful, they score lower when "care" is the variable. Interview data also supported these findings.

In one interview we heard this story:

The dad and I sat in the office looking at each other as we got "yelled at."

"Why are you skipping class?" the counselor asked. "You're never going to make it to college." "What are you thinking!" Well it turns out it was one class the student was skipping. Never once did the counselor say *why* aren't you going to *that* class? The student finally said the "teacher treats me bad." "I came here and tried to transfer out of the class multiple times but the

counselor wouldn't do it." "I don't want to skip class, I don't want to be in that class!"

Another Native community member raised these issues:

> I really am worried about the school system. We focus on attendance issues and ask how can we get Indian kids to school more? You should ask, are we killing them inside? Why don't we change structures? Kids aren't dropping out, they are being pushed out.

In other interviews, we learned more about how schools may be pushing kids out of school through what they choose to teach. Many Native community members said they did not see the content in public schools as relating to the everyday lives of Native young people. One interviewee described the concern like this: "The content has to relate to life; we learn through life, like math at the grocery store." Overall, interviewees advocated for a more relevant curriculum, one that "related to young people lives."

Another issue raised in the interviews related to *how* content and material were taught in schools. A consistent theme related to the typical pedagogy supported by schools. They described this pedagogy as "distant" and advocated to "stop the hierarchy mentality, make it more about [students], and empowering [students] to control their own lives." Others also indicated that there are major problems with education and employment. Young people may not be told that they have an opportunity to go to college, or that completing high school and college may be important. Some also mentioned more subtle but equally harmful problems; for example, several youth workers argued that young people are being addressed in school or elsewhere in ways that are neither culturally responsive nor responsive to the interests of these young people.

Related is a belief that Native young people are incapable or uninterested in education, a belief that often manifests as shallow or inadvertently racist attempts to engage Native young people in school or outside educational activities. The overall result of these failures in the education system are seen as setting up young people for gang involvement because gangs often provide what school does not–a form of protection, belonging, empowerment, and employment.

Community Perceptions. Significant findings emerged in our assessment of the Native community perceptions of Native youth gangs. One overarching finding was the notion of a "devalued adolescence,"[19] or as one of the tribal elders stated: Native youth are "inconsequential" to the larger U.S. society. Representations of Native youth are overwhelmingly deficit-based. Native youth are presented as "problems," "risks," and "delinquents"; they have trouble with drugs, alcohol, violence, and school. Not only are these consistent messages of damage, but they reinforce the idea that the root of problems in Native communities can be attributed to a lack of development, education, or skill while regularly submerging the social and historical contexts from which these issues emerge.[20]

Socially speaking, we found Native youth growing up in a hostile world. A consistent stream of microaggressions was reported across all facets of the data. Individuals reported having non-Indian people refuse to talk to them and serve them. A Native community member reported encouraging her young people to wear "Native Pride" sweatshirts only to later realize that they served as a source of identification and poor treatment. A former gang member told a story of attending parent-teacher conferences; the teacher made a comment about how his son didn't have a father, and the man said, "I am right here." The teacher responded, "But you don't even look like him" and refused to believe the student had a father. A survey of local news coverage reveals frequent assumptions and presentations of criminality, as well as ignorant messages such as the sign displayed at a high school football

Facebook

Hostility toward Native youth permeates American culture, such as this example from a Tennessee football game.

game in Tennessee that went viral on national news outlets.[21]

In addition, we found an intentional distinction in the Native community between "good gangs" and "bad gangs." Bad gangs were organized for profit and willful violence, and members were not envisioned outside of their social and historical contexts but *were* presented as passing a line of morality that could no longer be empathized with or understood. Good gangs, on the other hand, were thought of as organized in response to social conditions. Some elders and youth workers indicated that good gangs have existed since the 1960s and were often the result of a need for protection from other ethnic groups. Young people affiliated with gangs because they provided protection, an outlet to respond to the lack of social status and/or to attend to the lack of job opportunities and significant poverty, were not to be responded to in the same way as those who were involved in other activities. This distinction was made not to diminish accountability for gang activities, violence, or fear experienced by the Native community (which we do not report here but did find evidence of) but rather to articulate that the reasons for gang affiliation and gang-related activity must be considered when responding to such activity.

Finally, what did Native community members believe was causing gang problems? Reiterated several times in interviews were the social conditions of young people: intergenerational trauma, microaggressions, threats to sovereignty and identity, poverty, and unresponsive institutions. Some mentioned that a sense of belonging might be lacking because young people do not have access to their culture or traditional values, because their families are too overwhelmed or do not notice this need, or because young people are otherwise excluded from taking on meaningful roles. One interviewee connected gangs to living in a "postgenocidal culture." Some individuals viewed gangs as a foreign concept for Native people but a result of the injustices and genocide perpetrated against indigenous people.

The Native community had an expansive understanding of how to address the issue of gangs. Key areas of focus emerged:

[19] R. Dukes, R. Martinez, and J. Stein, "Precursors and Consequences of Membership in Youth Gangs," *Youth Society* 29 (1997): 139-165.

[20] E. Tuck, "Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities," *Harvard Educational Review* 79,3 (2009): 409-428.

[21] www.cbsatlanta.com/story/24039650 /metro-atlanta-native-american-reacts-to-al -trail-of-tears-sign.
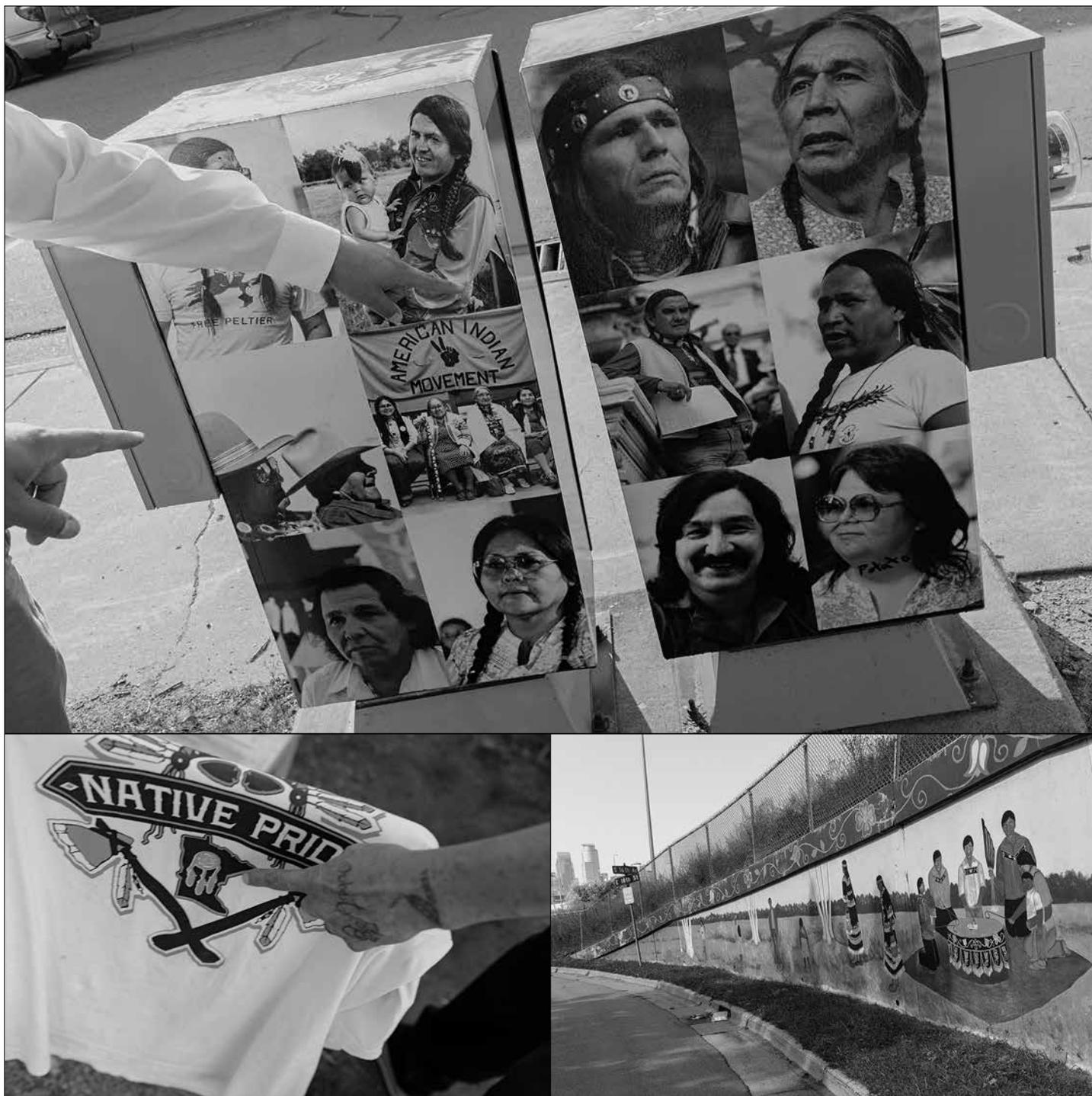
Several high-quality, effective community and culturally based youth programs have been developed and offered for Native young people, both on the reservation and in urban areas.

▶ families and parenting
▶ school
▶ youth services and programs
▶ addressing the legacy of trauma in the Native community
▶ working with young people directly on social and emotional development

The Native community advocated that a comprehensive response had to address both the social determinants (e.g., historical trauma, continuing discrimination experienced by Native youth) and individual behaviors (e.g., parenting styles and behavior, youth development). They agreed that work needed to continue to address the social determinants of gang activity and more efforts needed to focus on reducing troubling behaviors among Native youth.

Community Resources. Several high-quality, effective community and culturally based youth programs have been developed and offered for Native young people, both on the reservation and in urban areas. These programs have demonstrated positive outcomes in supporting healthy cultural identity, encouraging prosocial activities, and helping to address Native community-identified youth issues, such as youth unemployment and youth violence. Unfortunately, most of these programs are supported by grant funding and

often last only as long as funding is available. Large gaps in opportunities for young people in both reservation and urban communities often result. On the reservation, tribal government has begun to support robust and sustainable youth centers. In a very short period of time, these centers have attracted large numbers of community young people on a daily basis. The role and value of community centers and community-designed interventions in reducing youth involvement in gang activity should be considered.

Summary

We continue to work with our Tribal Advisory Committee to review and report on the Native youth gang assessment we completed. Based on our ongoing analysis, we offer initial conclusions based on the data we have presented in this report. First, for those Native youth who are significantly involved in violent, antisocial gang activity, current methods to address Native gang activity on a tribe-by-tribe basis are insufficient. Our findings suggest an approach that recognizes how Native gangs are interconnected by both family ties and collective experiences and concerns. We recommend collaborative efforts by tribal governments, human services, and police departments, across and between tribal communities, to better address gang activity in any single tribal community. Youth involvement in gangs will not be adequately addressed on a tribe-by-tribe basis but must include collaborative efforts across the Midwest.

Second, our analysis reveals evidence that gang involvement should be seen not only as a result of risk and protective factors in the lives of young people but also as a youth response to multiple, pervasive social factors, including historical trauma and continuing racism—"social determinants." We recommend a more focused attention on social determinants to better understand how these contribute to Native youth involvement in gangs.

Finally, we suggest a deep exploration of how young people can be involved in representing themselves and their tribal and Native communities, increasing societal consciousness, actively challenging a culture of social control, and strategically and intentionally resisting and challenging conditions that force them toward gang involvement. Too often, young people are viewed either as victim or criminal, especially in the literature on youth gang involvement. These images often shape prevention and intervention efforts toward either protective or punitive-based programming. We advocate for youth programming that acknowledges young people's agency and possibility and builds a stronger connection between young people and the communities they live in.

Our data support a holistic and expansive response to Native gang involvement that goes beyond law enforcement efforts to suppress criminal activity. While necessary as part of a holistic response, law enforcement should be part of a larger effort aimed at addressing young people's experiences of social exclusion and community isolation. Reducing Native youth gang activity will require not only diverting young people from gang activity, suppressing criminal activity, and providing engaging opportunities both in and after school hours but also addressing the legacy of historical trauma, the continuing effects of discrimination, and institutions that fail to respond to or support Native young people.

Ross VeLure Roholt is an Associate Professor of Youth Studies, School of Social Work, University of Minnesota. His scholarly interests include youth civic engagement; youth involvement in political, social, and community development; and civic youth work. He is an active community-based participatory researcher, and recent projects include an exploration of youth advisory groups across Minnesota, faculty and undergraduate student experiences in public-engaged coursework, an international project on university programs to support youth social entrepreneurship, and an evaluation of an online resource to support community civic action.

Katie Johnston-Goodstar is an Assistant Professor of Youth Studies, School of Social Work, University of Minnesota. She broadly explores the social and political contexts of indigenous youth development utilizing critical and indigenous approaches to research. Her current projects include a CBPR Native youth gang assessment, an exploration of Native youth media projects, and an evaluation of culturally sustaining practices for runaway/homeless Native youth.

Don Eubanks is an Assistant Professor for the Social Work Program at Metropolitan State University in St. Paul, Minnesota. Previously he was Commissioner of Health and Human Services for the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe Indians and Director of the Chemical Health Division for Minnesota's Department of Human Services (DHS). He also served as Director of Multicultural Affairs for the Chemical and Mental Health Services Administration for DHS. While completing his MSW at the University of Minnesota, he was a graduate assistant at the American Indian Research and Policy Institute, conducting community-based research in the St. Paul American Indian community. Don is a member of the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe Indians.