

Crime Reduction + Exploitation Diversion

CRED is a unique program that provides critical support for gang-involved youth or those at risk of gang involvement.

Kids as young as 12 years old are being recruited for criminal activities.

Kids who do not have strong family relationships or friendships are most vulnerable to exploitation. It is so important to reach these youth before they become entrenched in circles of crime. The counsellors at Pacific Centre Family Services are trained and keen to provide prevention services such as one-on-one counselling and life skills support, peer-to-peer interaction, family counselling, awareness building, and access to educational groups.

- One-on-one work with program coordinator, with a view to building trust and relationships
- Participation with other youth in pro-social groups
- Building knowledge and understanding of relationship violence for victim and perpetrator
- Support work with parents, including parent education
- Suicide assessment, where risk was identified, and related referral to medical professional
- Liaising with probation, MCFD and other external agencies; identifying where contact and interventions by other agencies would be advisable
- Referrals and supporting youth to participate in other programs, such as detox, (as deemed relevant) and/or supporting school registration where required
- Supporting youth by attending court with them, where relevant

Access to the CRED program is through direct contact with the CRED Program Coordinator by police, probation, schools, MCFD Social Worker, community service providers, parents and caregivers, or the youth themselves. **To connect with PCFSA's Crime Reduction & Exploitation Diversion Program, please call 250-478-8357.**

Background

CRED: well established and strengthening community bonds!

In August 2012, the CRED program was established by Pacific Centre Family Services (PCFSA) with funding from the BC Ministry of Justice. This program began as a two-year pilot project, to provide prevention, intervention, and mentorship to youth who have come to the attention of the law or who are vulnerable to exploitation or becoming involved in criminal and gang activities. In 2014 contract funding concluded but PCFSA has kept the program running, under reduced hours through grants from The Ministry of Justice's Civil Forfeiture Fund, Capital Regional District Family Court Youth Justice Committee, the Municipalities of Sooke, Esquimalt, Colwood, North Saanich, View Royal, Metchosin and investment from PCFSA funds.

Goals and Core Strategies...

The overall goal of the CRED program is to prevent youth involvement in gang activity in the Capital Regional District (CRD) by providing targeted intervention and support to youth at high risk of gang involvement, youth displaying gang-related behaviours and youth who are gang-entrenched.

Core strategies of the program include:

- One-on-one support plans and assessment
- Information and resources
- Pro-social opportunities and choices for youth participants
- Coordination and collaboration with other youth-serving agencies
- Engagement in research
- Information-gathering through online media
- Mobile off-site, front-line work and networking with MYST Officer

CRED is making a difference...

The CRED Program is making a difference by way of positive outcomes in our communities. The program has seen a direct reduction of youth engagement in violent or gang-activity because of their participation in the program. Program staff have noted an increase in the wellbeing of youth and their families, and friends. With support of the CRED program, institutional partners, and community groups, youth have been able to successfully exit gangs. The program's impact has been felt by peers and those members of the community who work with youth at risk.

The Fentanyl crisis and sexual exploitation...

PCFSA CRED Coordinator, Mia Golden writes (May 2017), "The Fentanyl crisis is not going anywhere. In 2016 in BC we had 917 deaths due to Fentanyl, and the numbers are increasing early into 2017. Additionally, every week we have multiple non-fatal overdoses due to Fentanyl. Despite these overdoses, youth are continuing to use. The world of social media has given predators and exploiters a valuable tool to lure youth into the world of exploitation, and with the presence of Fentanyl that risk has now increased to numbers we have not seen before. Exploiters are using various successful strategies to introduce Fentanyl to youth (often covertly) and once addicted they can exploit these young people into the sex trade".

CRED

Definition: Sexual Exploitation is the exchange of any sexual act, by someone under the age of 18 for money, drugs, food, shelter, transportation, love acceptance or any other offer.

Gang activity in the region...

Gang presence in Southern Vancouver Island is on the rise. There is a clear need for the CRED program. Gang-related violence and risks for youth within and across the 13 municipalities of the CRD region are real and growing. While many Vancouver Island residents are not aware of their presence, multiple gangs – with extensive networks in Seattle and Vancouver and beyond – have made inroads into our communities.

Victoria News Article on the CRED program:

<http://www.vicnews.com/news/victorias-youth-targeted-for-gang-recruitment/>

Collaborative model with other organizations During the initial stages of developing the project, a Monitoring and Evaluation Committee was established, consisting of representation from the Great Victoria School Districts, Victoria Police, Probations, MCFD, and Youth Community Intervention Programs. The committee was established to support planning for the project and to provide critical input on selection of an assessment tool.

Mobile Youth Service Team (MYST)

The Mobile Youth Service Team (MYST) was created 14 years ago to address the issue of Sexually Exploited Youth in the CRD. The MYST officer is a member of a local police detachment.

- *The CRED coordinator and MYST officer spend one day a week together reaching out to youth who are at risk of gang involvement and sexual exploitation. Their joint intelligence and regional presence creates an effective partnership that successfully serves youth and supports them towards healthier and safer lifestyles.*

Ongoing Partnerships

- Provincial Ministries and Government Agencies
- Victoria and District Police Departments
- The Victoria Family Court & Youth Justice Committee
- Municipal, Regional and School District Partners including SD61-Greater Victoria, SD62-Sooke, and SD63-Saanich
- Capital Region Action Team for Sexually Exploited Youth (CRAT/SEY)

Referrals to the CRED program

Access to the CRED program is through direct contact with the CRED Program Coordinator by police, probation, schools, MCFD Social Worker, community service providers, parents and caregivers, or the youth themselves. The referral request is responded to within 5 – 7 business days. In this process, an initial screening and assessment takes place to assist with prioritization. The time from referral to assessment is usually minimal, often occurring 3 days after initial referral. The average length of time current participants in the program have been in the program is 6 months, with the longest-term participant having been in the program for 15 months and the shortest-term participant less than one month.

- *In addition to gang involvement, CRED youth participants have had a range of police contacts and involvements with the justice system, including robbery, obstruction, assault with a deadly weapon, break and entry; assault causing bodily harm, mischief, possession, robbery with a deadly weapon, extortion, shoplifting, trafficking, uttering threats, and breaches of parole.*

Referrals and the numbers of youth involved in the program continually increase as service providers, schools and police are now familiar with the program.

Program Coordination

The Program Coordinator uses a range of strength and needs-based approaches to conduct comprehensive assessments of participants, and to help guide plans for ongoing engagement and support. Individualized plans have been created for each of the youth the program has engaged thus far. These plans include, but are not limited to:

- One-on-one work with program coordinator, with a view to building trust and relationships
- Participation with other youth in pro-social groups
- Building knowledge and understanding of relationship violence for victim and perpetrator
- Support work with parents, including parent education
- Suicide assessment, where risk was identified, and related referral to medical professional
- Liaising with probation, MCFD and other external agencies; identifying where contact and interventions by other agencies would be advisable
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- Supporting youth by attending court with them, where relevant

Youth Groups

In collaboration with PCFSA's Youth Services Program, the CRED program offers groups for youth who are attending the Westshore Learning Centre. The groups provide space for youth who are at risk for gang related behaviour and/or sexual exploitation to meet, engage in pro-social activities, and learn/talk about a range of issues related to risk and safety. Groups focus on crime reduction and exploitation prevention, including empathy, emotion management, identity, forward thinking and the impact of choices.

Connection with PCFSA Youth Services Team

The CRED Program Coordinator meets regularly with our Youth Services Team to discuss youth program specific issues and provide each other with case consultation. In addition, clinical supervision and support is offered by the program director and external clinical consultants.

Program Accessibility, Efficiency, and Effectiveness

Throughout all program activities, whether liaising with agencies as part of case management or as outreach to identify available services, the CRED Coordinator is sharing information on an ongoing basis with frontline service providers, educators and youth programmers.

- This collaborative approach leads to improved capacities to identify youth at risk of gang involvement in the long-term.
- This investment improves youth access to services, improves quality of services available for youth, and ensures that the assessment, planning and case management process for youth is effective.
- The CRED program has experienced a notable increase in the number of referrals from schools across the Capital Regional District, as a direct result of outreach.
- Positive developments have been documented for all youth who have participated in the program to date, including the successful exit of a number of prominent gang leaders within CRD gangs.
- Youth have accessed supports and services they otherwise would not have received.

Services and supports accessed

- Participation in groups for participants who may be at risk for exploitation
- Support to identify resources and transition plans for viable and safe exit from a gang
- Support to enrol in alternative school
- Support to access health services as needed
- Free passes to community recreation centres for program participants due to institutional agreement established by program coordinator
- Support and adult accompaniment when attending court or legal proceedings
- Information and knowledge shared with participants about risks, potential emotional, social and legal consequences of risky behaviour, and choices for healthy relationships and activities
- Support in recognizing and naming participants' strengths and assets in their lives
- Participation in PCFSA's Youth Skillz training program (Skookum Bistro) to help develop employment skills as well as self-esteem and social competence

"I get to start fresh"

Testimonial from a youth who was supported by

the CRED program to successfully exit from a leadership role in a CRD-based gang.

With CRED program support, the youth also participated in a restorative justice healing circle with members of his community, and has since become an active and contributing member of that community.

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