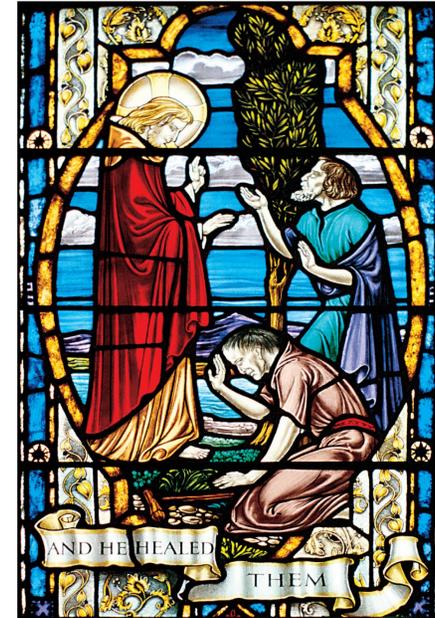## What Can We Do?

• Address elevated risk factors for joining a gang.

• Strengthen families.

• Reduce youth's conflicts.

• Improve community-level supervision of youth.

• Provide training for teachers on how to manage disruptive students.

• Provide training for parents of disruptive and delinquent youth.

• Review and soften school "zero tolerance" policies to reduce suspensions and expulsions.

• Ensure that punitive sanctions target delinquent gang behaviors, not gang apparel, signs, and symbols.

• Provide tutoring for students who are performing poorly in school.

• Increase adult supervision of students after school.

• Provide interpersonal skills training to students to help resolve conflicts.

• Provide a center for youth recreation and referrals for services.

• Provide gang awareness training for school personnel, parents, and students.

• Teach students that gangs can be dangerous.

• Provide training for school resource officers in mediating conflicts.

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Wellness Words

February 2018

Gang Prevention Awareness
Month

" I have come that you may have life and have it more abundantly."
John 10:10b

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Wellness Words
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www.ncjrs.gov

Did You Know?

- Youth join gangs for protection, enjoyment, respect, money, or because a friend is in a gang.

- Youth are at higher risk of joining a gang if they engage in delinquent behaviors, are aggressive or violent, experience multiple caretaker transitions, have many problems at school, associate with other gang-involved youth, or live in communities where they feel unsafe and where many youth are in trouble.

- To prevent youth from joining gangs, communities must strengthen families and schools, improve community supervision, train teachers and parents to manage disruptive youth, and teach students interpersonal skills.

Race

According to the 2008 National Youth Gang Survey, half (50 percent) of all gang members are Hispanic/Latino, 32 percent are African American/black, and 11 percent are Caucasian/white. Studies where youth self-report gang membership show more equal proportions of racial/ethnic groups in samples. For example, in a 15-city sample, racial and ethnic proportions of youth reporting gang membership were quite similar for whites (7.3 percent), blacks (8.3 percent), and Hispanics (9.0 percent), but larger (12.9 percent) for multiracial groups.

Starter Gangs

Children and adolescents form starter gangs to introduce themselves to gang culture (i.e., distinctive attitudes, jargon, rituals, and symbols). In some areas, established gangs sometimes create cliques or sets composed of younger youth called "wannabes," "juniors," "pee wees," and the like (Vigil, 1993). Where members of starter gangs may engage in minor delinquent behaviors, gang members may be involved in serious and violent offenses.

Popular Culture

Apart from personal reasons for joining a gang, media presentations make gangs seem very appealing. The "hip" lifestyle and sensational portrayals of gangs and their members have a significant influence, particularly on more susceptible youth. Increased media popularization of gang culture has led to the point that a lot of young people in America recognize the look, the walk, and the talk of gang members. Many mimic it in part or in whole. Many try it out as a personal style. Play groups, break-dancing groups, taggers (i.e., graffiti artists), and school peer groups experiment with gang life. The diffusion of street gang culture in modern-day movies, music, and clothing merchandizing has served to intertwine gang culture with the general youth subculture.

Individual Risk Factors

A number of personal risk factors make children more likely to join gangs.

- **Antisocial behavior.** Children whose antisocial behavior consistently worsens are most likely to join gangs.

- **Alcohol and drug use.**

- **Mental health problems.**

- **Victimization.** Children who are victims of abuse or neglect are more likely to join gangs.

- **Negative life events.** Youth—particularly boys—who experience negative life events also are more likely to join gangs. These events include failing a course at school, being suspended from school, having a fight or problem with a friend/romantic association, and the death of someone close.

- **Weaknesses in family structure.** Children from a single-parent household, multiple family transitions, or caretaker changes, poverty, and general financial stress are potent risk factors.

For more information, or to report gang activity in your area, contact the United States Department of Justice, District of South Carolina.

Greenville Main Phone: (864) 282-2100