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in completing this workbook

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Gangs: A John Howard Society Literacy Workbook

This workbook was developed for the use of the John Howard Society of Manitoba Literacy program. It contains 20 lessons on issues related to gangs and gang life. It covers everything from “What is a gang?” to violence in gangs, to suggestions for resources that can help you get out of a gang if you have chosen to.

Each of the lessons is followed by an exercise to help you build your reading and writing skills. You’ll learn about capital letters, using full sentences, and writing letters and poetry. Some of the lessons contain a “Literacy Tip” to help you with the reading and writing skills the book is teaching. Feel free to skip the Literacy Tip and go straight to the exercise if you’re already familiar with that skill.

Read each lesson carefully and take your time on the exercises. Ask a friend, staff member or tutor for help if you need it.

Best of luck and happy reading!

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Lesson #1

What is Literacy?

When we say “literacy,” we are talking about how well a person can read and write. Reading and writing are important skills for everyone, no matter how old you are, where you live, or what you do for a living.

Many people want to get better at reading and writing so they can finish Grade 12 or get a GED. These are great goals to have, but there are also a lot of other good reasons to practice these skills, even if you don't plan to go back to school.

We use literacy skills every day. We read recipes and bus schedules. We fill out job application forms or court documents. We search for information on the Internet. We read stories to our kids or read the directions on a bottle of medicine so we know how much to give them when they are sick. Some of us read for fun, too: books, magazines, poetry, and newspapers. The list goes on and on.

There are many reasons why people can't read or write as well as they would like. Maybe they left school early to get a job or because they got in trouble with the law. Maybe they didn't learn much about reading or writing while they were in school. Maybe they speak another language and are learning English for the first time.

It's never too late to get better at reading and writing. Most cities have adult literacy programs that help people to improve these skills. Workbooks like this can also help.

We think people learn best when they are reading about something interesting, so this book is about gangs. When we wrote this book we interviewed people who are in gangs or who used to be in gangs. We hope you enjoy reading their stories.

Exercise #1

Tell us a bit about your reading and writing skills. If someone is marking this workbook for you, it will help them to know more about you.

What grade did you last finish in school? _____

Do you remember how long ago it was or how old you were?

Think about how you spend your day. Can you think of two ways that you use reading skills?

Can you think of two ways that you use writing skills every day?

What is one literacy skill you'd like to improve? Do you want to be able to read more quickly? To read larger words? To spell better? To use commas? To write an essay or a short story? Something else?

Tell us about your most important reading and writing goal.

Lesson #2

What is a Gang?

Sometimes when people talk about gangs, they are really just talking about groups of people. Older people might use the word “gang” to refer to a group of kids they see hanging around the neighbourhood.

This book talks about a different type of gang, gangs that are sometimes called “street gangs” or “organized crime.” We are talking about people who come together as a group to get involved in some sort of illegal activity. This could be selling drugs, stealing cars, or committing robberies or break and enters. Violence is often also a part of gang life.

When we say “gang” in this book, we’re talking about a group that:

- covers a certain area, territory or “turf”
- is made up mostly of young people, in their teens or twenties
- has some kind of leadership, and different types of members
- might have its own colours, logos, or signs

Gangs can be very different from one another. Some are more organized and have regular meetings. Members may get directions from leaders or other more experienced members. Other gangs are less organized, and each member does their own thing, while still spending a lot of time with the group.

Gangs are very active in the city of Winnipeg, and we often read about gang violence in the newspaper. During a survey on youth gangs in 2002, the Winnipeg Police Service guessed that there were about 2,000 gang members under the age of 22 in the city. Ten years later when we wrote this book, they stated that between 15 and 20 different gangs are active in Winnipeg. These are large numbers for such a small city.

Gangs and gang violence are a regular part of life for some people, and even for some children, depending on where they live. Some people feel as though they have no choice but to join a gang. Others may have had a choice, but they made that choice when they were very young.

It is important to talk about the harms of being in a gang, and to give people who are in gangs help getting out if they want it. But it is also just as important to talk about why there are so many gangs in our society in the first place. Why does Winnipeg have more gangs and gang members than some bigger cities like Montreal? Why are there gangs in the North End of Winnipeg but not in Tuxedo?

This book will help you answer some of these questions.



Literacy Tip: Complete Sentences

In this workbook you'll be asked to answer questions in complete sentences wherever you can. A complete sentence is one that has a subject (the person or thing in the sentence that is doing something) and that contains a complete thought.

The following are **not** complete sentences:

Can be dangerous.

Went to the store.

A very talented kid.

They are missing the subject, which is the most important part of any sentence. Adding the subject is easy. It's whatever comes to mind when you say, “What can be dangerous?” or “Who went to the store?”

Street gangs can be dangerous.

Tony went to the store.

My little sister is a very talented kid.

Sentences also need to contain a complete thought. They need to explain what the subject is doing, or being.

The following are **not** complete sentences:

A bicycle with a broken wheel.

The capital of Manitoba.

Craig and Robin.

To complete these sentences, you need to fill in missing information. You need to answer the question “is what?” or “does what?”

A bicycle with a broken wheel isn't much good to anybody.

The capital of Manitoba is Winnipeg.

Craig and Robin decided not to go to the concert.

Exercise #2

Decide whether the following sentences are complete, or whether information is still missing. Write “C” if the sentence is complete, and “I” if it is incomplete.

1. This book talks about street gangs or organized crime. _____
2. People who are involved in illegal activities. _____
3. Selling drugs, stealing cars, and committing robberies. _____
4. Gangs can be very different from one another. _____
5. Made up mostly of young people. _____
6. Often read about gang violence. _____
7. According to the Winnipeg Police Service. _____
8. Gang violence is a regular part of life for some people. _____

Choose three of the incomplete sentences and rewrite them below to make sure they are complete.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Lesson #3

Why Do People Join Gangs?

People have many different reasons for joining a gang. We interviewed gang members and former gang members while writing this book. They shared some of the reasons they joined.

“At home, I got consequences lots. I got disciplined, so I think I already had that character where you're looking for that. In a gang, there's tons of rules, tons of discipline. The gang was just a part of me growing up.”

“Being in a crew is safety in numbers, I guess. You're at a party and you've got all of your friends around, so you feel safe.”

“I just wanted to chill with people who wouldn't come after me. When I was chilling with my homies, it was a chance for me to get back at my parents through other people. It wouldn't be me taking a beating anymore, it would be me giving one.”

“I had a great childhood. I had great parents, great family support. I don't have any skeletons in the closet... I had a good education; I played sports. But I've always had issues with authority and I don't like being told what to do... I liked to get out with the boys and not care about what people think, and just do my own thing.”

“Part of it is just being with a group of other kids, having a sense of belonging. Also, movies portray gangs in a glamorous way and you idolize them. For me this was starting at a young age – like maybe eight or nine.”

“I just had that rush. You know the way you do when you see other people dressed nice, wearing jewellery, girls surrounding them, power, that respect, you know. You feel like an outsider, and then you look at your cousins and your brothers and you have that urge. I wanted to feel like that, and be like that. The more I thought about it, the more I wanted to be a gangster.”

Exercise #3

In your own words, write down three of the reasons the gang members in Lesson #3 gave for joining gangs. Use complete sentences.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

List any other reasons you can think of that weren't mentioned.

Lesson #4

Joining a Gang

“Patches and stamps ain’t just given away. You’ve gotta earn it. You’ve gotta earn their respect in the gang. And that’s what I did.”

- a former gang member in Winnipeg Remand Centre

The process of joining a gang is different for everyone. Some people are said to be “born into” a gang, if they have parents, older siblings, or other family members who are involved. Others join on their own later in life, often in their early teens.

People hoping to join a gang are sometimes called “strikers” or “prospects”. Books, movies, and newspapers often talk about gang initiations where a new member gets “jumped in” or “beat in”. A group of gang members kicks, punches, and beats the new member for a set amount of time. They do this to test the new member’s toughness and loyalty to the gang. In some cases the person is not allowed to defend themselves or fight back.

The gang members we interviewed say that sometimes initiations like that still happen. But more likely, a person is tested in other ways. They must prove themselves over a long period of time by selling drugs or doing other tasks. They may be given “missions” to complete, such as robbing someone or beating someone up.

“Some older guy will tell you, 'I need you to get like, three car stereos so that I can sell them. I'll give you this much,'" explains one former gang member. “It's never a good price, but it's just to see if you can handle putting in work, and contributing.”

Not all initiation tasks are violent, though. Some may not even be illegal. The point of an

initiation is to show that you can take orders from those who are higher up in the gang than you.

“I actually had to remodel a guy’s bathroom,” said one of our interviewees. “I’m the most useless person with a hammer in the whole world, but it’s just something I had to do to prove that I was serious and willing to do the grunt work.”



Literacy Tip: Punctuation

“Punctuation” refers to the symbols in a piece of writing that guide us along, showing us how to read it. Commas (,), quotation marks (“ ”), colons (:), and semi-colons (;) are all examples of punctuation.

This lesson focuses on end punctuation, the type found only at the very end of a sentence. There are three types of end punctuation: periods (.), exclamation points (!), and question marks (?).

A period is most commonly used, and makes a statement. For example:

Joining a gang sometimes involves an initiation.
I’m really enjoying the class that I’m taking.
It looks like it’s raining again.

A question mark, of course, asks a question. For example:

What happens during a gang initiation?
Have you decided what you’re doing this weekend?
Could you help me with these boxes?

An exclamation point is used to show excitement, fear, or anger. For example:

Help! Someone’s after me!
Stop that right now! You’re really getting on my nerves!
I can’t wait for Friday!

Exercise #4

The following story is taken from a book called *Inner-city Girl Like Me*, by Sabrina Bernardo. The book is about a teenage girl who joins a gang. The book is fiction, but it is based on the author's life growing up in Winnipeg.

All the end punctuation has been taken out of this story. Go through the story and put the correct punctuation in at the ends of the sentences.

“Are you ready ” Gina asked me with a smile

I looked around at the other faces in the circle All four were mad-dogging me as if to intimidate me A crowd had formed around the circle to watch the next Diablo join the family I gave Gina a quick nod She gave me the honorary first punch straight to the head I stumbled back a bit and felt the impact sting my eyes Connie then punched me in the stomach Nathan punched me on the other side of my head and Darrel kicked my legs

Would it ever end I was getting pushed, punched and kicked within that circle for five minutes, but it seemed to last forever Through it all, I kept telling myself, “Don’t fall down Not in front of all these people ”

When someone outside the circle whistled, I was allowed to sit down I hurt all over, especially my head, where Gina had punched me

The crowd cheered as I sat on the grass with my face in my hands I was almost in tears but no one was going to see that I felt hands pat me on the back and I looked up and saw Gina and Darrel smile at me as they lifted me up by each arm

Gina pulled a red bandanna out of her pocket and began to wipe my face She then crowned me, tying the rag around my throbbing head

“This is yours now, and you deserve it,” Gina said

“Where’s your smile ” Darrel asked

I gave him a faint smile, but was in too much pain It didn’t matter, though I felt grown up I was a Diablo now I was thirteen years old

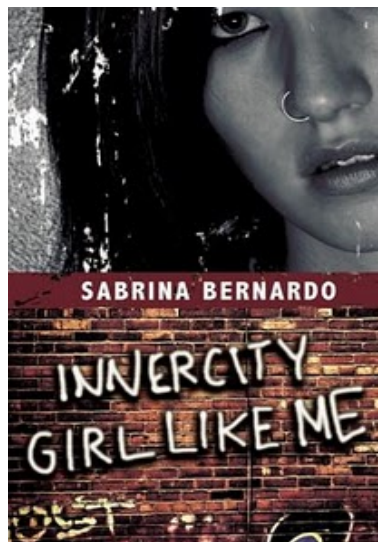
Excerpts from *Innercity Girl Like Me* © 2007 by Sabrina Bernardo published by HarperCollins Publishers Ltd. All rights reserved.

Read the story again and answer these questions. Use complete sentences. You will know if you have used a complete sentence if you can read your answer on its own – without the question – and it still makes sense.

How long did G Child's initiation last?

How many of her friends were involved in jumping her in?

How did G Child feel about the experience?



Lesson #5

Joining a Gang: One Person's Story

Bryce is in his mid-twenties and is trying to leave the gang he has been in for 15 years. He sat down with us to talk about his experiences, and we asked him how he got involved in a gang at such a young age.

Bryce came from a family where abuse and violence were common, and he often found himself running to the streets to get away from it. Here is his story:

I was about nine or ten. I seen these kids a couple of years older than me that were terrorizing people, smashing bottles and shit. I had no shoes, and I was hungry, with no real place to go, so I walked up to them and asked them, "What are you guys doing?"

They seen that I had no shoes, and they asked me why. Then they told me I could just chill with them. "If you're hungry," one of them said, "we can go to my auntie's and eat."

So then we go to their house and from there we go out at night, doing missions like emptying cars out, smashing windows, and spray painting.

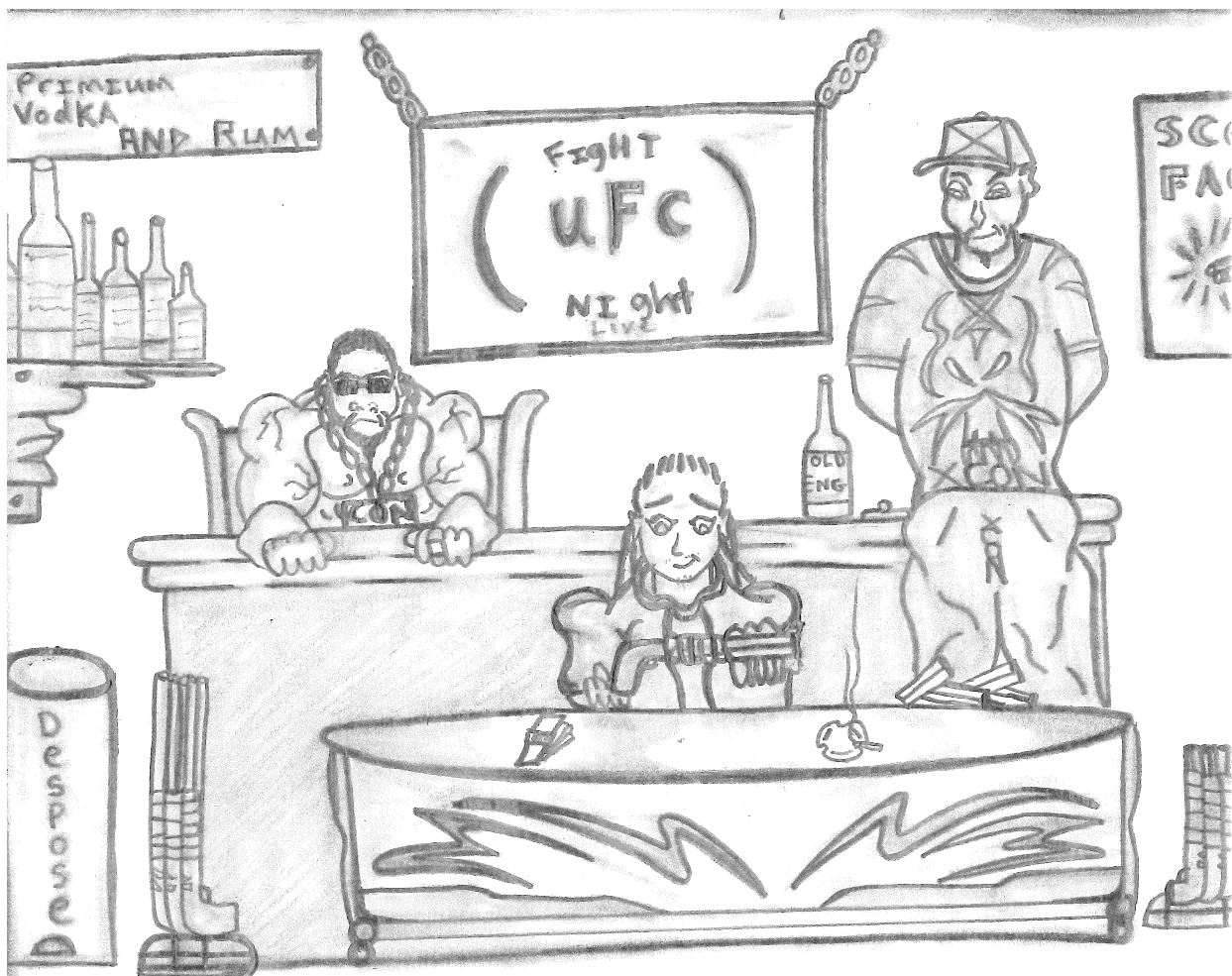
Me and those kids that were terrorizing, we all went to homey's auntie's place, and from there we went to someone else's place. Cousins and friends come over, and everybody's talking, drinking, blazin' weed. Then the guns come out and suddenly it's, "Yo, you and your homey want to do some work for me?"

There would be like, ten guns on the table, rifles and shotguns, and I'd have to sit there with a hacksaw and saw the barrel off and tape up the handles and triggers. You know,

just in case. I would wipe the bullets down.

So then we're around guns, and we're thinking, "Oh, I've never shot a gun before. I'll do that for sure." Just to be around them, you know? After that, I think that sparked an interest.

I never thought about what I was supposed to be thinking or how I was supposed to be feeling. I was just like, "Oh, that's a gun. And I'm doing my homey a favour."



Literacy Tip: Finding the Main Idea

Every story has a main idea. When we say, “What’s the main idea?” we mean, “What’s this story about?” Some main idea statements are too broad. They don’t tell us enough about the story. Others are too narrow. They only tell us about one part of the story, but not the whole thing.

Look back at the story you just read in Lesson #5. Then read the main idea statements below.

- A. This story is about gangs.
- B. This story is about a boy who was put to work sawing off shotguns.
- C. This story is about a boy who ended up joining a gang at a young age.

Statement A is too broad. Sure this story talks about gangs, but let’s be more specific. There are a lot of things we could write about gangs. We could write about what a gang is, as we did in Lesson #2, or gang violence, as we will in Lesson #10. We could write about a friend who was in a gang, or how to get out of a gang, or some of the differences between gangs. “This story is about gangs,” doesn’t give us enough information.

Statement B is too narrow. Working on guns is just one thing that happens during the story. There are other important things that happen. What is the most important thing that happens in the story? The most important thing is that the boy meets some kids in a gang, and he eventually joins their gang. Sawing off shotguns is just a part of that.

Statement C is the correct main idea statement. It includes everything in the story. Everything the author tells us is about him joining a gang.

When you are asked, “What is the main idea?”, picture yourself reading a story or news article, and a friend comes up and asks, “What’s that about?” Try to think of a way you can tell your friend about the whole story in just a sentence or two. That is a good main idea statement.

Exercise #5

Read the paragraphs below:

A group of young people in the Manitoba Youth Centre were asked to share how they thought their lives would have been different if they had known about other choices or had more support. They listed many things that they thought could have helped them to avoid gangs.

Some wished they'd had better access to employment training and alternative school programs. Some felt their upbringing had been a problem, and mentioned a need for more positive role models. Others pointed to a need for more recreation opportunities, like sports or free activities in their neighbourhoods. They also suggested that more alcohol and addictions programs for youth be made available.

(From Project Gang-Proof: Street Gang Awareness for Families and Communities)

What is the main idea of these paragraphs?

Do you think any of these suggestions would have made a difference for Bryce, whose story we heard in the lesson? Why or why not?

Lesson #6

How Do We Compare?

As we mentioned in Lesson #2, the number of gangs and gang members is different in every city. Almost all cities have gangs, but some cities have more gang activity than others. How can we tell which cities have the biggest problems with gangs? Where do these problems come from?

In 2002, police from several cities in Canada took a guess at the number of gang members in their city. In the chart on the next page, the numbers are listed from largest to smallest. But some cities are larger than others, so we cannot just compare numbers to see who has the biggest gang problem.

If there were 10 restaurants in a town, would we say that town had a lot of restaurants? Well, we might say it did if there were only a couple of thousand people in the town. But what if there were 5,000 people in the town? Or 10,000? Or 15,000? 10 restaurants might be plenty for 1,000 people, but it's not a lot for 15,000.

It's important to look at the total population of a group when we are comparing a smaller part of that group. If we compare the number of gang members with the total number of people living in the city, we can tell which cities have the most gang activity for their population. This is called "per capita." The phrase "per capita" is a Latin phrase meaning "for each head."

City	Number of gang members	Population of city	Gang members per capita
Winnipeg	2,000	671,141	2.98
Toronto	1,100	2,500,000	0.44
Saskatoon	580	225,681	2.57
Vancouver	550	1,964,285	0.28
Montreal	500	1,620,693	0.15
Edmonton	300	937,500	0.32
Regina	275	193,246	1.42
Ottawa	250	806,452	0.31

The larger the number in the “per capita” column, the more gang members a city has for its size. These numbers have probably changed since 2002, but we can still see that there are big differences in the number of gang members in each city.

Many researchers who study gangs say that gangs are more common in cities where many people are poor and have very little power, and especially in cities where there is a large difference in wealth between the richest people and the poorest people. Sometimes race also plays a role. In cities where many of the poorest people and the people with the least power are of a certain race, gangs made up of people of that race may form. Joining gangs is one way people with very little power or money try to get some of both.



Exercise #6

Look back at the chart in the lesson to answer the following questions. Use complete sentences where you can.

1. Which of the cities listed in the chart has the largest population?

2. Which of the cities listed in the chart has the smallest population?

3. Which of the cities has the largest number of gang members?

4. Which of the cities has the smallest number of gang members?

5. How many gang members are there from cities in Saskatchewan?

6. How many more gang members are there in Montreal than in Edmonton?

7. Which city has a bigger gang problem: Montreal or Edmonton? Explain your answer.

The cities in the chart in the lesson are listed in the order of which of them has the most gang members. Use the blank table below to re-write the cities from the chart in the order of which of them has the most gang members “per capita” – that is, which of them has the most gang members for its size.

Name of city	Number of gang members per capita

Which city has the most gang members per capita? _____

Is this the same as the city with the most gang members? _____

Which city has the second most gang members per capita? _____

Is this the same as the city with the second most gang members? _____

Which city has the least number of gang members per capita? _____

Lesson #7

Differences Between Gangs

Gangs can be very different from one another. No two are exactly the same.

Some gangs are very organized. They may have regular meetings once a month or even once a week where they make decisions as a group. They may even have a president, secretary, and treasurer. Some gangs have their members pay membership dues so that the gang will always have money.

Other gangs are less organized. They might be just a group of friends who party together and commit crimes together but who don't have meetings.

As we learned in Lesson #4, some gangs have a certain process they use every time they want to initiate a new member. Other gangs just watch the person for awhile to see if they will be a good fit.

Most gangs are organized in a hierarchy. The word "hierarchy" means that power is not shared equally between people. There is always someone at the top of a hierarchy. There is always someone in the middle, and someone at the bottom. Usually the number of people at the top is very small and the number of people at the bottom is larger.

You will find hierarchies all over the place. Most workplaces are set up in a hierarchy. The boss is at the top. He or she makes the most money and has the most power. The employees are at the bottom, because they have less power and money. They have to listen to the boss. There might be different classes of employees. For example, a fast food restaurant might have one manager or owner who is at the top, then five assistant managers who are in the middle, and then 30 people who flip burgers and cook fries.

Gangs that are set up this way might have different ranks a person can pass through. They might start as a striker, then move up to be a soldier, a captain, a lieutenant and a full-patch member. Not all gangs have many different ranks, though. It depends on how organized they are.

Some gangs have certain rules for who can and cannot join. Most gangs don't allow women, for example. Some gangs do not allow members under 18. Other groups will take whoever is interested, no matter their age.

"If we don't take you then someone else will," said one gang member we interviewed. "If you don't pick him up, that person could be your next enemy."

Gangs are different in a lot of ways, but they also have many things in common. They are all made up of people who consider themselves very close friends or family. They are also all involved in crime and violence. The next few chapters will talk about some of these issues.

Literacy Tip: Commas and Lists

Earlier we talked about end punctuation, which is the type of punctuation used to end a sentence. There are several other important punctuation marks found inside a sentence. One of these is the comma (,).

Commas are used to create a pause between parts of a sentence or between items in a list. For this lesson we'll focus on the use of commas in lists.

The following sentence is confusing:

I'd like to invite Kim Rick James Tony and Suzanne to my graduation party.

How many people are you inviting? Are you inviting Rick James, or Rick *and* James? It's hard to tell without commas. The sentence can be made clearer by separating the people in the list using commas:

I'd like to invite Kim, Rick, James, Tony, and Suzanne to my graduation party.

Put a comma after every item in the list except the very last one. Your reader will thank you!

The meaning of a sentence can change depending on where you place your commas. Take these sentences, for example:

We bought cheese, milk chocolate, tuna salad sandwiches, and jam.

We bought cheese, milk chocolate, tuna salad, sandwiches, and jam.

We bought cheese, milk, chocolate, tuna, salad, sandwiches, and jam.

How many grocery items are in the first sentence? How about the second? The third? The words are the same in all three, but the meaning changes depending on where you put your commas.

Exercise #7

Add commas to the following list sentences:

1. Some gangs are very organized and have a president vice-president secretary and treasurer.
2. They may have meetings once a month twice a month or even once per week.
3. In some groups a member can move through the ranks of striker soldier captain lieutenant and full patch member.
4. A person might not be able to join because of their race age or gender.
5. Gangs are different from each other but they also have many things in common: committing crimes making money defending a territory and being involved in violent activities.

Write three list sentences of your own. Put at least three items in each list. If you need help coming up with ideas for your lists, think of foods you like, movies you've seen, places you've visited, or the names of your siblings, kids, or best friends.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Lesson #8

Homies and Bros: Friends and Family in the Gang

Friendship becomes an important part of gang life. Many gang members say they think of their fellow members as family, and that they trust them with their lives.

Friendships in gangs can be complicated. Some people say that your fellow gang members are your best friends when times are good, but if you make a mistake they can turn on you. Sometimes if you leave a gang your friends quickly become your enemies.

Greed can also break up friendships, as one gang member we interviewed explained:

“There's scary times, man,” he recalled. “You go do a mission and your homey will flip on you. I did a B & E with this one guy. I had a handful of rings, and then I got pistol-whipped by my own homey. He just wanted the jewellery, you know. You've gotta watch out for your own homies... There's always the opportunity for someone to turn on you.”

Another person we interviewed said, “Some people are like, 'Man, my bros are always my bros.' It's not true. Your bros will rob you, man. Your bros will punch you out. I've seen enough to know it's not worth it. It was good at the beginning, but for how long, though? I thought it would last forever, but it doesn't.”

A search for friendship and a sense of belonging is one reason people sometimes join gangs, but they might find that it's not all it's cracked up to be.

“At first everybody wants to join a gang,” said one former gang member. “They want to be popular, have nice clothes, drugs, booze, money, women. But then when it hits you in the end, when you really think about it, you think, where's your friends? Where's your

homies? Who's sending me letters in jail? Who's coming to visit me? It's actually the people that I hurt out there who are coming in here to visit me now."

Friendships can also be a cause of violence in gangs. If a gang member's friend is hurt or killed by a rival gang, he feels a responsibility to even the score.

"When you live the way we did, if your friend was in trouble you'd show up with trucks full of guys with baseball bats," said one person we interviewed. "You would go to any lengths. Some guys jump you out and you don't even need to ask for help. You care so much about these people that the thought of them getting hurt is preposterous to you. You'd do whatever you could to either avenge it, or protect them."

Friendships can be the cause of a lot of problems in gangs, but they can also be very meaningful and important. Most people we interviewed wanted to make the point that gangs are not just about money and violence. People form close bonds with each other.

"Some guys go to jail and other guys take care of their kids, help out, look after their families while they're away. Since I've been to jail, people have dropped off two or three hundred dollars worth of groceries for my girlfriend, and stopped by to make sure she's okay. People don't always see that side of it."

Some gang members truly do see each other as family, and stick by each other in hard times. That can make it difficult to leave a gang, even for those who really want to.

Literacy Tip: Synonyms

Synonyms are different words that mean the same thing or almost the same thing. The words “homey” and “bro,” for example, are synonyms for the word “friend”. Other synonyms for friend are “buddy”, “chum”, and “pal”.

Synonyms for the word “big” include “large”, “huge”, “hefty”, “enormous”, and “gigantic”. You might notice that some of these words seem “bigger” than others. For example, “enormous” and “gigantic” usually describe something larger than the words “large” or “big”. Be careful which synonym you choose. If you want to describe an extremely large rottweiler, for example, you might say the dog is “enormous” instead of simply “big”.

Why are synonyms important? They make your writing better and more interesting. Imagine that you're writing a short story about arriving on a magical island where all of the people are 8 inches tall and most of their houses only come up to your knee.

You could write about the puny peasants that live in the pint-sized village, driving their miniature cars to and from their teensy offices. They come home and eat meager meals consisting of wee salads and microscopic baked potatoes. Then they tuck in their tiny children and curl up in their own little beds for the night.

Or, you could write about the small peasants in their small town, with their small cars and their small offices, eating their small dinners and sleeping in their small beds. But that's not very interesting writing, is it?

Here are some other examples of synonyms to get you started:

Cold	chilly	frigid	freezing
Dirty	messy	filthy	unclean
Smart	clever	intelligent	brilliant
Talk	speak	chat	discuss
Child	youth	kid	youngster

One of the best ways to learn about synonyms is by looking through a thesaurus. A thesaurus is like a dictionary, but instead of definitions for each word, it has synonyms for each word.

Exercise #8

All the words in column A were used in Lesson #8. Use the space beside each word to write the synonym from column B that best fits that word.

	Column A		Column B
	family	1	error
	scary	2	difficulties
	mistake	3	relatives
	rival	4	frightening
	problems	5	chance
	popular	6	enemy
	opportunity	7	destructiveness
	violence	8	well-liked

We talked about how gang members may see each other as a family. Use the space below to write a few sentences about your own ideas about family. What are the qualities of a good family? What sorts of things should families do together? What sort of a family would you like to be a part of?

Try to use two at least two words that are synonyms for each other in your answer. Underline the synonyms. Don't forget to use complete sentences!

Lesson #9

Pitfalls of Gang Life

“Pitfall” is a word used to describe an unexpected danger, something you didn't see coming. Some synonyms for pitfall are “hazard,” “obstacle,” or “drawback.”

The word “pitfall” comes from the practice of digging a hole and then covering it with leaves and branches in order to create a trap for an animal. The animal walks over the leaves without realizing it and then falls into the pit.

Most people who join a gang expect that there will be some pitfalls to the lifestyle, but sometimes there are pitfalls they haven't even thought about.

Some people join gangs as a way to make money, but they soon find that the money isn't as good as they thought it would be. Very few people ever get rich off of crime, and even those who do might decide it's not worth it because they never really feel safe. It also may not be worth it because gang members often find themselves in jail. Going to jail seems to be a regular part of life in a gang.

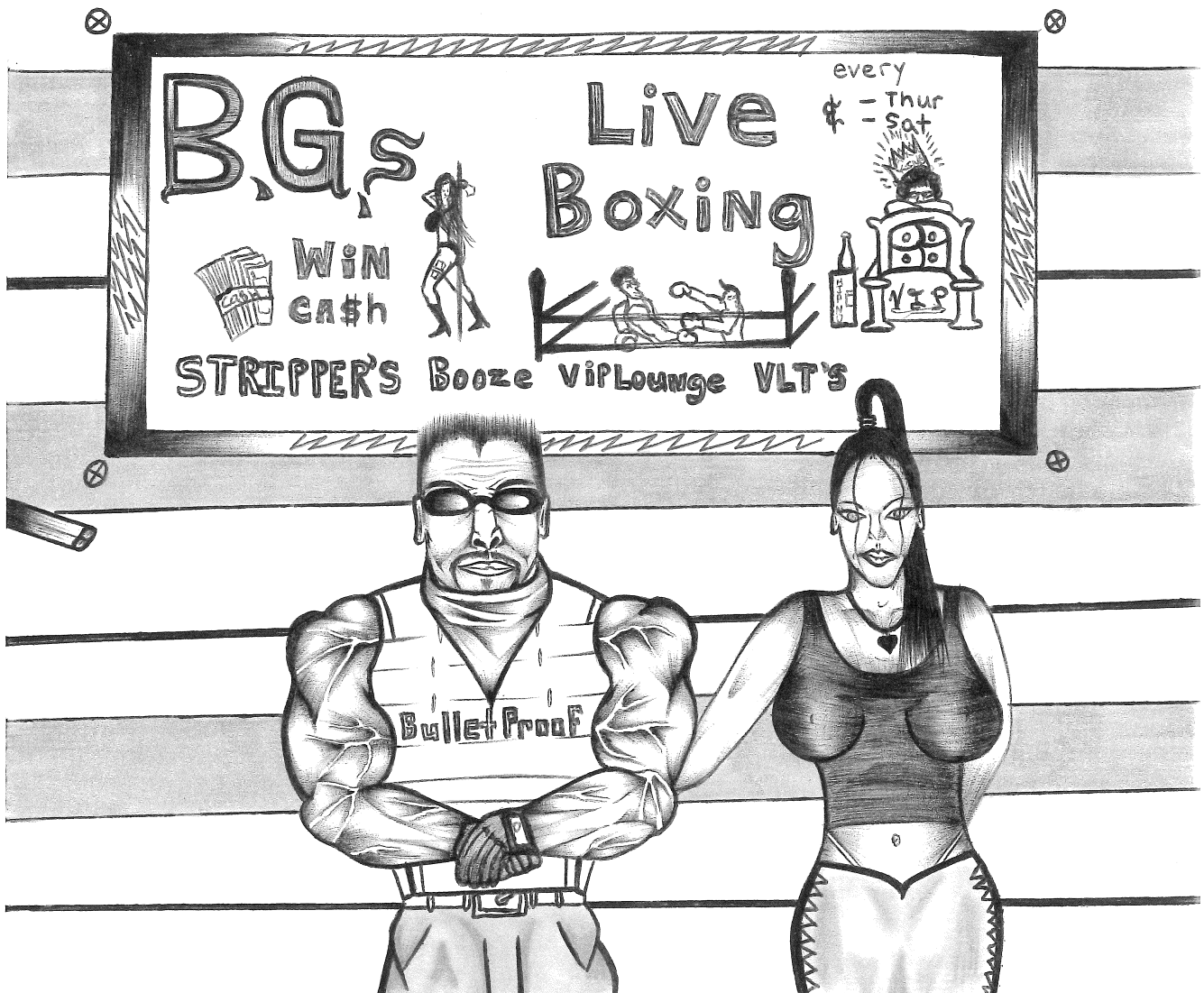
Some people join gangs as a way of finding power and authority. They might be disappointed to realize that they have to take orders from higher-ups and do what they are told most of the time. The lifestyle may not be as rebellious as they thought.

Most people realize that they will experience some violence and danger in a gang. What they may not realize is that their family and friends may also be in danger.

“The people who are supposed to get shot never get shot,” said one man we interviewed. “It's always the girlfriend, the friend, or the random passer-by. Gangsters can't shoot –

it's a classic saying, because no one who's supposed to get hit ever dies. It's always the other people. So unless you're a complete degenerate, you don't want to involve other people in that. It's not like, 'C'mon honey, let's go out bar-hopping tonight, while I wear my bullet-proof vest and you don't.'"

Relationships can be challenging for people in gangs. The story coming up in Exercise #9 is a good example of that.



Literacy Tip: Capital Letters

Capital letters are also sometimes called “upper-case letters”.

You've probably already been using capital letters at the beginning of each new sentence you write, as well as for people's names. Make sure you're also using capitals every time you use any other kind of name, whether it's the name of a store, the name of a movie, a city, a country, a river, a holiday, or a day of the week or name of a month.

The chart below gives a few examples.

No capital needed	Capital letter needed
month	August
province	Nova Scotia
school	John M. King School
favourite band	Led Zeppelin
my sister	my sister, Jessica
a doctor	Dr. Dre
city	Vancouver
lake	Lake Winnipeg

Also keep in mind that the word “I” needs to be capitalized, as though it is a name. This is true whether “I” appears at the beginning of a sentence or somewhere in the middle.

For example:

I couldn't wait to be done work for the day so **I** could take my motorcycle out for a spin.

My friend Kevin has always been like a brother to me, and **I** am lucky to know him.

Exercise #9

All of the capital letters are missing from the following story, which talks about a reporter who interviewed a young gang member about his life and his relationships.

Circle the letters below that should be capitalized. Remember to use capitals for sentence beginnings, as well as for all names of people, places or things.

alex orders two beers, both at the same time. he tells me a story about a girl he met a year ago. she was fourteen, and involved with a rival gang called the cholos.

“i didn't care,” alex says. “when i met her, it was a whole different story for me. my insides felt different.”

they had a secret relationship for several months. he borrowed a car and took her to an olive garden south of houston near the johnston space centre – “the one place i knew i wouldn't find any gangsters.” he went to jewellery dog USA at the sharpstown centre and bought her a fourteen carot gold necklace with a medallion that read “love.”

when a friend heard about the relationship, she told him it was just like romeo and juliet. alex had never heard of the shakespeare play, but he went to a video store and rented three different versions of the movie.

“and we watched them all,” he says.

there is a silence, and alex finishes one of the beers. he tells me that the girl's mother learned about him. she realized that if the cholos learned about the relationship, her daughter could be killed. one day, mother and daughter disappeared.

“they went to central america somewhere,” alex says. “i could never find out. right before they left, i told my girl that we were going to get married and leave houston and start a new life with a baby. i told her we could go to north carolina.”

“why north carolina?” i ask.

“i’ve never been there, but I know it’s far away. i told her i would always wear a shirt so no one would see the tattoos – so no one would find me. i cried like a baby when she was taken away from me.”

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Lesson #10

Gang Violence

“If you want to be in that world, it gets violent, and it gets violent quick,” warned one former gang member while being interviewed in the Winnipeg Remand Centre.

Violence is a regular part of life for gang members, whether it's a result of retaliation from other gangs or from discipline within one's own gang. Many gangs hold D-boards (disciplinary boards), where they punish their members for mistakes by beating them up, sometimes in a group and for a set period of time.

Some gang members also commit acts of violence as part of their initiation, during the course of money-making activities such as robberies, or just as part of daily life. One gang member interviewed for this book recalled beating up strangers on the street from a very young age.

“I remember going out with the guys and having to punch out two people, for two people. Two of us would get out of the car or get off our bikes, and go and stomp someone right out. To see if we had the balls to do it, or to see if we could handle it. It could be anybody: kids, adults, old people.

Back in the day, I didn't know anything else. I just knew violence. I would run away from violence at home just to be violent towards other people on the street.”

Others say the violence is less regular, and it isn't forced on members from higher-ups. Still, gang members are expected to be tough, and be ready to defend each other using force.

“You're not asked outright, but you're expected to be able to go. I would expect that if I was in a bar and there was a fight going down, that people on the program better step up. You're never told that, but you know that's what's expected of you.”

Whether violence is a daily event or something that happens once in a while, being a gangster is a dangerous job. Michael Chettleburgh is a researcher who studies gangs in Canada. He used the death rates of gang members to calculate how likely a gangster is to die in the course of his “work,” compared to other jobs. Gang members, he said, have a 1 in 164 chance of being killed. This is five to ten times more dangerous than the jobs held by loggers, fishers, oil-rig workers, steelworkers, farmers and coal miners. The death rates for street gang members are more than ten times higher than the death rates of soldiers who served in the Vietnam War.



Literacy Tip: Quotation Marks

Earlier we talked about end punctuation – those punctuation marks used at the end of sentences. Another important punctuation mark is the quotation mark (“ ”). Quotation marks come in pairs and are used to show that someone is speaking. You're probably already fairly familiar with these if you read books, magazines, or newspaper articles. Look back at Exercise #9, for example. Since the reporter is interviewing Alex, everything Alex says out loud is in quotation marks.

End punctuation changes a bit when we use quotation marks. Where statements usually end with a period, we end them with a comma when we're using quotation marks, so that we can add the words “he said” or “she said” to complete the sentence.

For example:

I'm going for a walk.

becomes

“I'm going for a walk,” he said.

If we can already tell who is speaking and don't need to write “he said,” we can continue to use a period to end a sentence in quotation marks.

For example:

I saw Jonah leaving the house angrily, so I stopped to ask him what was up.

“I'm going for a walk,” he said.

“Okay. Let's talk about this when you get back.”

Here's the confusing part. While a period inside quotation marks changes into a comma, exclamation marks (!) and question marks (?) inside quotation marks stay the same.

For example:

“How did your test go?” her mom asked.

“I totally aced it!” Chrissie shrieked, jumping up and down with excitement.

Exercise #10

Earlier in this workbook, you read about G Child's initiation into the Diablos. The scene was taken from a book called *Inner-city Girl Like Me*. Later in the novel, G Child and two other female gang members are mourning the death of a good friend who has died as a result of violence.

Read through the story and put quotation marks and punctuation in where needed.

Violet and I drove to the cemetery in silence

As we approached the black iron gates, Violet hung back a little. I can't do this she said

Will you be okay? I asked her, knowing that this stress was not good for her pregnancy

I'll do my best

Violet and I stood close to each other. We listened to the priest say his final prayer and prepared ourselves to see our friend lowered into the ground.

Why didn't anyone call me Gina said as she crept up behind us. Violet jumped

Nobody knows how to get ahold of you I said, looking into her red and puffy eyes.

I'm around Gina said, choking back tears.

She stared into the distance and slowly put her head down. I'd never seen her look so weak and vulnerable

She looked up at me with no sign of hiding her emotions. Did you think I wasn't going to care she demanded. Did you think I wasn't going to miss her? I know I was wrong.

She held me tight, my face in her long black hair. I hugged her as hard as I could

The priest finished his prayer and the coffin was lowered into the ground All three of us stood near the edge and watched

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Gina take something out of her pocket. It was a picture of us: Jessica, Violet, Gina and me standing outside our apartment. I remember the picture well. It was the first day we moved in. We were surrounded with garbage bags full of our clothes and cardboard boxes full of junk. We looked happy. The excitement of starting this new life of money, power and independence filled us, but most importantly, we were starting it together.

Gina admired the picture and tossed it into the six-foot hole. It landed face-up. The first shovel of dirt hit the picture. It's all gone, I thought, just like Jessica was gone and the dream was gone. It was being buried with her.

Excerpts from *Innecity Girl Like Me* © 2007 by Sabrina Bernardo published by HarperCollins Publishers Ltd. All rights reserved.



Lesson #11

How Are Communities Affected by Gangs?

We have talked a lot about how gang members are affected by their own involvement in gangs. It is also important to talk about how their communities are affected.

The violence that gangs produce sometimes reaches people who have nothing to do with gangs. Bystanders have been shot by accident. People have been robbed or assaulted by gang members doing “missions” or trying to make money.

When people are robbed or attacked, they often lose more than just their money or their stuff. They also lose their feelings of freedom and safety. They may be afraid to walk to work on their own or send their children to school. Becoming a victim can affect someone's whole life and the lives of their families and friends.

Gangs and gang violence can produce fear and anger in communities and neighbourhoods. Parents may be afraid that their children will join gangs or that they will become victims of violence. Business owners or home owners may be angry when their property is stolen, or damaged by gang graffiti.

Sometimes community members are so scared and so angry that they feel gang members should be punished more harshly. They feel that police and politicians should “get tough on crime” and put gang members in jail for longer. We'll talk later about how this plan probably won't work. But sometimes people feel so desperate and helpless that they think this is the only answer.

Literacy Tip: Paragraphs

Paragraphs are a way of organizing writing to make it easier to read and understand. When there is a lot of writing on a page, it can be difficult to read if it just appears in one giant chunk. Try reading the passage below:

There are several ways you might be able to identify someone as belonging to a gang. First, some gangs display particular colours, mostly on their clothes, to show that they belong to a gang and to promote membership. Sometimes they wear certain types of clothing in specific ways. For example, putting a hat on sideways or rolling up one pant leg. Their clothing might display gang logos, names or graffiti. Bandannas or “rags” are also a common sign of gang membership. The way a person wears their hair might indicate membership in a gang. For example, they may wear braids, shave parts of their heads or eyebrows, or dye their hair a certain colour. Tattoos can also show gang membership. They may be crude or elaborate, and worn anywhere on the body, including hands, arms or legs. Full members may have tattoos that cover their entire backs. Gang members might also be carrying weapons. These range from common weapons like guns or knives to less common weapons like pool balls wrapped in a sock, brass knuckles, baseball bats and chemical pepper spray. Unusual hand signs can also show gang membership. Hand signs usually involve twisting fingers and hands to form letters or numbers that represent gang symbols or initials. Gang members may also use specific handshakes to send a message.

This is hard to read, isn't it? It is easier on the eyes to break this large block of text into smaller sections, called paragraphs. You start a new paragraph by moving to the next line and leaving an extra space between the edge of the page and the first word of the paragraph. Or just leave extra space between paragraphs.

How do you know when to start a new paragraph? Watch for a change in topic. The large piece of writing above is all about how to identify gang members, but there are smaller topic changes throughout. First, the author mentions gang colours. Then they talk about gang clothing. Next, they're discussing hair, then tattoos, then weapons and then hand signs and handshakes. Each of these could be its own smaller paragraph.

Here is an example of how the large block of text on the last page could be divided up into paragraphs.

There are several ways you might be able to identify someone as belonging to a gang. First, some gangs display particular colours, mostly on their clothes, to show that they belong to a gang and to promote membership.

Sometimes they wear certain types of clothing in specific ways. For example, putting a hat on sideways or rolling up one pant leg. Their clothing might display gang logos, names or graffiti. Bandannas or “rags” are also a common sign of gang membership.

The way a person wears their hair might indicate membership in a gang. For example, they may wear braids, shave parts of their heads or eyebrows, or dye their hair a certain colour.

Tattoos can also show gang membership. They may be crude or elaborate, and worn anywhere on the body, including hands, arms or legs. Full members may have tattoos that cover their entire backs.

Gang members might also be carrying weapons. These range from common weapons like guns or knives to less common weapons like pool balls wrapped in a sock, brass knuckles, baseball bats and chemical pepper spray.

Unusual hand signs can also show gang membership. Hand signs usually involve twisting fingers and hands to form letters or numbers that represent gang symbols or initials. Gang members may also use specific handshakes to send a message.

These are the exact same words, but it’s a lot easier to read. Note that there is a change of subject in each new paragraph.

Exercise #11

Look through the piece of writing below and think about where you would break it up into smaller paragraphs. Circle the first word of each sentence that you think should be the start of a new paragraph.

Here are some tips for parents, caregivers and families on preventing children from joining a gang. They may seem like simple things, but often they can make the difference between gang involvement and drugs, or growing up in a positive healthy environment. Get help for your child or teen if they need it. If your child makes a bad choice and is in trouble, don't hesitate to ask for help. Contact a local community agency, friendship centre, school or government office to see if they offer support programs for parents and families. You should also get help for yourself. We can all use help as parents. There are resources in many communities that offer parenting classes. One example is a program called Triple P Parenting, which stands for Positive Parenting Program. It's also important to stay connected to your child by spending time with him or her, playing games, reading, or even just going for a walk. Get to know your child's friends and their families, and make sure you know where your child is at all times. Make sure they're not on the streets alone. Finally, talk to your child about gangs. Let him or her know that gangs can not only hurt them – they can also hurt other family members. Advise your child not to hang out with gang members, go to parties organized by gangs, use hand signals or wear gang clothing. Make sure children know the consequences of participating in criminal activities.

(From Project Gang-proof: Street Gang Awareness for Families and Communities)

What is the main idea of this piece of writing?

Lesson #12

Getting Out: Deciding to Leave

All of the men that we interviewed for this book had either left their gangs or had decided that they wanted to in the near future. We asked them, “What made you decide to get out?” Here's what they said:

“I guess I just lost the heart for it. The cons outweighed the pros. I was getting tired of getting told what to do by other people. You do live your life according to other people's schedules. My parents were upset about it. My girlfriend hated it. It was dangerous. It was time for a change.”

“Well, I just don't want to spend the rest of my life in jail for something dumb, in the name of a gang. I've had enough of that.”

“With my kids, I felt really ashamed being a gang member. All my life, man. Their friends' parents are doctors and lawyers, and I'm a gangbanger. What do I do on Take Your Kid to Work Day? Where do I take 'em? I felt pretty embarrassed when there was a Take Your Kid to Work Day. I felt my daughter's embarrassment that day. It really kind of hit home right then.”

“My baby momma put it in my head. She's like, ‘You want to live like this? I don't want to live like this. I don't want my kid growing up not knowing his dad.’ It made me think, because I grew up not really knowing my dad. I mean, I know who made me, but I don't really know him.”

“I created my son, and I don't want my son to live the life that I did. If I knew then what I know now, I would have never done it. I would have just toughed it out, stopped trying to be a gangster, stopped trying to impress people. I would have just been somebody in the long run, instead of trying to be somebody now and always trying to prove something. Prove what to who? And what am I proving myself to be? I'm proving myself to be an asshole, to be honest with you. Everyone who tries to be a gangster, tries to steal from people, shoot people, that's all you're doing.”

Leaving a gang can be dangerous, said some of the gang members we interviewed.

Other gang members may try to intimidate people into sticking with the gang. There is no one strategy that is guaranteed to keep you safe, but our interviewees had a few

suggestions:

“Of course they won’t let you leave, because you know so much. You know that saying, ‘the enemy of my enemy is my friend.’ Well, if you leave, you could be the enemy’s friend... If you want, you can go into hiding, but if you want to get out and be a man, then be a man. Walk with your head high. If you see them, you see them. Face your fears. If you’re going to get out, get out.”

“You have to stick to your guns. No humming or hawing. If you're done, you're done. Don't try to just quit and keep going to the parties. And try moving, maybe. I know it's expensive, but you've got to do what you can to get out for good. You can't have one foot in and one foot out. I've known people who have tried that, and those are the ones who get hurt.”

“Just do it. Just quit, and stay low. Don't shit-talk anybody. Don't shit-talk your clique. Just leave.”

“You know what I find, is if you quit and you can just stay away for a couple of years, it’s a whole new set of people who don’t even know who you are to begin with. You stay out of sight and out of mind, and people forget about you.”

Sometimes leaving can be very dangerous. Other times, a person might not feel threatened by their former gang members. Still, deciding to quit can be difficult. It may mean leaving behind close friends or family members. It means giving up an entire lifestyle and making big changes. We'll talk about some of these changes in the next two lessons.

Exercise #12

In your own words, write a paragraph with the main idea of “Reasons some people choose to get out of gangs”. You can use ideas from the lesson, or your own ideas, or both. Use complete sentences and end punctuation.

Lesson #12 contained advice from gang members about getting out of gangs. In the space below, write about the best advice you ever gave someone, or the best advice someone ever gave you. Talk about the situation you were in, and what the advice was, and why it was good advice.

Lesson #13

Alternatives to Gang Life

The word “alternatives” is used to talk about the different choices or options that a person has, both good and bad. For example, using margarine is an alternative to using butter. Writing the GED is an alternative to going back to school full-time. Taking the bus or riding your bike is an alternative to driving.

There are alternatives to being in a gang as well. Some people link up with a gang when they are young because they are looking for a family environment or a sense of belonging. They may be able to make a different choice that would also give them those things. Sports teams, volunteer groups, religious or cultural groups, and after-school clubs such as music or art groups can give people a sense of community and family.

For those who are already involved in a gang, there may still be alternatives. One of them is trying to get out of the gang, as we discussed in the last lesson. Getting out is often a good choice to make in the long run, even though it can be difficult to do. But it’s not the only choice a gang member needs to make. After leaving the gang, he or she will now want to find new friends, a new community, and new ways to spend spare time.

Former gang members should think about their skills, talents and interests as they design their new lives. Do you love writing? Making music? Helping young people? These passions could be an enjoyable hobby or maybe even a new career. The advice from a former gang member on the next page talks about using skills learned on the street to find a new job.

Anything Is Possible

Many people in desperate circumstances don't realize that everyone has a certain talent in some area. Finding what that is can be the key to success when you're in a struggle where all odds are stacked against you.

There are obviously extremely talented sports superstars and rappers who have gone from rags to riches, but there are also many other ways to pursue goals that some people never even think about. There are lots of ways to use the talent you possess to succeed in life, rather than using it for the opposite. One example is the ability to manipulate people. If you can manipulate people into engaging in crime, you can turn that talent into marketing yourself as a good employee or a student who deserves a student loan to go to college. You may have the ability to be in sales by marketing a product to consumers.

Another example is the person who operates a drug enterprise. The downside of this line of work is obvious: the chance of jail or being the victim of violence. But if you're good at it, or think you could be good at it, you probably have the basics of a business mind. Maybe you're good with handling money, or managing "employees." With these kinds of skills, a long range goal could be a business of your own.

This may look like too high of a goal from your present position, but think positive. Take small steps and remain determined. Don't think of anything as impossible. Everything is possible with the right spirit and determination.

(adapted from an Internet website on gangs)

Literacy Tip: Alphabetical Order

A common way to organize information is to put it in alphabetical order. If you've ever browsed through a library or a CD store, you'll notice that everything beginning with "A" is grouped together at the beginning and everything beginning with "Z" is grouped together at the end, with all the other letters falling in order between.

Learning about alphabetical order will help you in organizing files in an office, looking up a word in the dictionary, or finding a name in the phone book.

In alphabetical order, we look at the first letter of a word and compare it to the first letter of other words. For example, "dragon" comes before "sandwich" in alphabetical order because the letter "d" comes before the letter "s". "Hurt" comes before "jump", "cold" comes before "route", and "Styrofoam" comes before "torch".

It gets a little more difficult when the first letter of two words is the same. At that point, we move on to the second letters, and compare them.

"Fire" and "farm" both begin with "f", so if we want to put them in order we need to look at the second letter. "A" comes before "i", so "farm" would come before "fire" in alphabetical order. "Crib" and "crab" both begin with "cr", so we'd move on to the third letter to decide which comes first. "Crab" would come before "crib", because "a" comes before "i".



Exercise #13

These groups of words come from the passage you read in Lesson #13. Write the words in alphabetical order on the lines below:

goals
opposite
employees

ability
determination
marketing

determined
violence

crime
struggle
success
steps

college
certain
consumers

succeed
stacked
circumstances

Write one sentence that includes any three words from the lists above. Make sure all three words are in your sentence, and underline them.

Lesson #14

Some Challenges

Anyone who decides to leave a gang will face some challenges as they try to adjust to a new way of life. Many gang members made most of their money through crime, and now they may need to find a job or go back to school instead. They may not have much work experience, or maybe it's been many years since they were in a classroom. Both work and school can be tough to get used to for someone who is new to them.

Former gang members may need to change the way they dress and the way they talk in order to succeed at work or school. They may need to give up friends or family members in the gang who they cared a lot about. They may not feel as safe now that they are no longer a member of a larger group.

Even ex-gang members who do a great job at living a new, “normal” life can have difficulty with stereotyping. The word “stereotyping” means that people sometimes form ideas about others based on how they look or how they are dressed. For example, they may assume that someone who is dressed in baggy pants and covered in tattoos is a gang member, or that they are violent and dangerous.

On the next page you'll read a story about Reymundo, a former gang member who learns about stereotyping on the bus on his way to a job interview. Read the story carefully so that you can answer questions about it later.

You will notice that some words are underlined. The Literacy Tip for this lesson will explain why, but don't worry about them for now.

Monday Morning Bus Ride

Monday I left the centre dressed as I never dressed before in my life. I was wearing a black suit, a white shirt and a tie.

What I liked most were the looks of approval and respect I got from the passengers on the bus I took. I didn't see the customary looks of fear and nervousness. People just looked my way and smiled politely. As I approached an empty seat next to an older woman, she moved her bag away from the seat to make room for me instead of further occupying it, as I was used to people doing. I sat next to her and said thank you.

“Are you having a good morning?” the lady said.

“Yes, I am,” I responded.

I didn't know what to make of all the politeness directed my way. I began to think about how the lady, and the rest of the passengers on the bus, would react if they knew I was a convicted felon. I knew that the nice clean suit made all the difference in how they reacted.

I will never forget that day. The reaction from the other passengers on that bus still makes me smile and helps me keep my priorities in order. Although I'm well aware that some of the world's biggest felons wear suits every day, I'm still satisfied with not projecting fear of violence on those around me.

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Quick Tip: Nouns

A noun is a word or a group of words that is used to name a person, place, or thing. Look back at the story you just read and you'll see that all of the nouns in the story are underlined.

Here are some examples of “person” nouns:

girl, boy, teacher, Mrs. Potts, Mr. Dressup, doctor, Dr. Hibbert, Jake, Mary, Kevin, postal worker, friend, cousin, mayor

“Lady”, “passengers”, and “felons” are all examples of person nouns from the story you just read.

Here are some examples of “place” nouns:

store, office, lake, Lake Winnipeg, neighbourhood, country, Australia, town, city, island, Las Vegas, suburbs, prairies, Alberta

“The centre” is an example of a place noun that is named in the story.

Here are some examples of “thing” nouns:

rock, tree, desk, stapler, dog, baseball, weekday, money, love, peace, cotton candy

“Shirt”, “tie”, “bus”, and “seat” are all examples of thing nouns from the story. They are objects that you can see and hold. But “fear”, “approval”, “priorities”, and “respect” are also nouns. They are things too, even though you can't see them.

Nouns are usually the first types of words children learn when they are learning to speak.

Exercise #14

The last story we read was about Reymundo riding the bus to his job interview. The passage below talks about what happens once he gets there.

Read through this passage and underline as many nouns as you can find.

I arrived at the employment office about twenty minutes before my appointment. The receptionist gave me the application so I could fill it out while I waited. This would be the first time in my life that I actually completed a job application on my own.

I became extremely nervous as I glanced down the application. Here I was, a man in my twenties, and all the work experience I could account for was a year at the University of Chicago. It didn't help that the reason for leaving was "I quit." Then came the most embarrassing question on the application.

"Have you ever been convicted of a felony? If yes, explain."

That question blew my mind. I just slumped in my chair and stared at it. I felt so humiliated looking at a work application and not having anything positive to put on it.

I have never forgotten the shame I felt that day. Each and every time I see a job application I feel the same way I did that day, especially when I read that question that still sends chills up my spine.

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Now think of the first story when answering the following questions.

Reymundo was an object of stereotyping when he was on the bus. People assumed he was a “good” guy because he was dressed nicely. If he had been dressed like a gangster he would have been treated much differently.

Can you think of other groups besides gang members who are stereotyped?

How did Reymundo feel about the way he was treated on the bus?

Reymundo says, “Some of the world’s biggest felons wear suits every day.” What do you think he means by that?

Lesson #15

Getting Out: Who Can Help?

Former gang members trying to make changes to their lives will have many needs. We're hoping that the resource listing at the back of the book will be useful for readers who are trying to make this change. These resources are for Winnipeg but if you live somewhere else you could try contacting the John Howard Society in your area with any questions.

Here are a few important areas to think about:

Employment:

Finding a good job can be a challenge at the best of times. It can be even tougher for those with a criminal record. Opportunities for Employment is one good place to turn for help with job searches. They offer help with writing resumes and give workshops that teach their clients important job skills. They specialize in helping people who have criminal records. Their offices are located 300-294 Portage Avenue.

Job-hunters should also check with friends or family members who are employed or who have businesses of their own, since they may be able to recommend you for a job. This is called networking.

Education:

Going back to school can be an important step as well. This could mean finishing up your Grade 12 diploma, or even just taking some literacy classes to improve your reading skills. There are many types of literacy and education programs in Winnipeg for all levels of readers.

A Grade 12 diploma might be closer than you think! The Province of Manitoba offers an opportunity called the Mature Grade 12 diploma. This means that if you have been out of school longer than a year, you no longer need 30 credit hours to graduate like you did in high school. All you need is eight credits – four Grade 12 credits and four other credits. You can get these credits by taking courses at an adult learning centre. Examples of adult learning centres include Winnipeg Adult Education Centre at 310 Vaughn Street, and Louis Riel Institute at 150 Henry Avenue.

There are also many programs in the community that help with basic literacy skills. Two examples of these are LiteracyWORKS Inc. at 500 Portage Avenue and the Aboriginal Literacy Foundation at 181 Higgins Avenue.

Everybody's learning goals are different. You can ask John Howard Society staff to help you choose a program that fits yours.

Hobbies and Recreation:

Finding safe and healthy ways to spend spare time is also important. We talked in an earlier lesson about how gangs provide a sense of friendship, belonging, and excitement for many people.

Fortunately these things can be found in other places as well: sports programs, arts and culture programs, social groups, religious groups, volunteering opportunities, and many more.

Art City and Broadway Neighbourhood Centre are great examples of free arts and recreation programs that may interest creative folks. There are centres called "Lighthouses" which provide after-school programming for youth. The Indian Family

Centre is one centre dedicated to cultural programming. There is information about these programs and many more at the back of the book.

Counselling and Treatment:

It can be helpful to have someone to talk to when making a major decision or big life changes. Treatment and programs may be important to consider as well.

The Family Centre (204-947-1401) is one example of an agency that provides counselling services for individuals, couples, and families. Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre (204-925-0300) holds parenting classes and family violence prevention groups. The Behavioural Health Foundation (204-269-3430) offers a residential drug and alcohol treatment program.

Contact information for all of the programs mentioned here can be found in the resource listing.



The Aboriginal Centre at 181 Higgins is one example of a place you can go in Winnipeg for help with reading, writing, and completing a high school diploma.

Literacy Tip: Filling Out Forms

If you've ever applied for a job, visited a hospital or clinic, or signed up for a program, you have likely filled out a form. Many of the groups, organizations and centres listed in this lesson will have registration forms for new members or clients. Forms are everywhere and everybody comes into contact with them at one point or another.

Unfortunately, forms can be difficult to read and understand. They often contain a lot of large words or words we don't use very often in everyday conversation. They also contain “fine print” -- the small type at the bottom of the form that some people may forget to read.

When you receive a form, make sure you read it carefully before filling it out. Watch for instructions. You may be asked to use a certain colour of pen, or to print in all capital letters, or to colour in a box rather than placing a checkmark in it. It's important to make sure you are filling out the form correctly.

It's also important to make sure you understand all the information on the form. A form often tells you about your rights and responsibilities, and when you sign one it means you have agreed to them. If you don't fully understand the wording, you could be agreeing to something without knowing it. For example, you could be giving an organization permission to share your personal information with other organizations. You could be agreeing to a yearly rent increase of a certain amount when you sign your lease. You could be giving up your right to sue someone if you are injured.

Don't sign a form if you don't understand what it means. Ask someone to explain the form to you. Below are some common words used on forms, and what they mean.

Consent – to give permission

Forfeit – to give up

Authorize – to give authority (permission) to

Affirm – to state that something is true

Eligible – meeting all the requirements

Confidentiality – your privacy; your right to have your information kept private

Withhold – to hold something back; to avoid telling someone something

Disclose – to make known; to reveal

The form on the next page is an example of an application form to Opportunities for Employment, an agency we discussed in the lesson.

Application Form

Participant Identification:

Social Insurance Number: _____

Name: _____
(last name) (first name) (middle name)Date of Birth: ____/____/____ Preferred language: English French Gender: Male Female
(mm) (dd) (yyyy)

Residential Address: Apt. # _____ Street Address _____

Delivery address (eg. Box or R.R.) : _____

City/Town _____ Postal Code _____

Telephone Number _____ Alternate Number _____

E-Mail Address _____

In case of emergency, contact: _____ Phone no. _____

How did you hear about us?

Walked by (self referred)

Friend/Relative

Silverbox Recycling Bin Advertisement

Newspaper Advertisement

OFE Main Office

Provincial Assistance (Social Assistance/EIA)

Poster

Internet

Other _____

Income Source:

The following information will assist in determining program eligibility. Please complete all sections that apply to your situation.

Are you currently receiving Employment Insurance Benefits?	Yes	No
Are you currently receiving Worker's Compensation Benefits?	Yes	No
Are you currently receiving Disability Benefits from Private Insurance?	Yes	No
Are you currently receiving benefits through the Rebound Program?	Yes	No
Are you currently receiving Employment and Income Assistance Benefits?	Yes	No

Education: Highest grade/level of education completed: _____ Year completed: _____

The following information is used for statistical and program planning purposes. Providing this information is voluntary.

Are you a person with a disability? Yes No Not Declared

Are you a person with a criminal record? Yes No Not Declared

Are you a member of a Visible Minority? Yes No Not Declared

If Aboriginal, please indicate which group best describes you:

Inuit

Metis

Non-status

Status – Off Reserve

Status – On Reserve

I give consent for OFE to contact my E.I.A. case coordinator, Manitoba Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade, and employers for follow-up reasons. By signing this statement, I affirm that the information I have given is true and complete, and that I have not withheld any information. I authorize OFE to obtain further information about me and check the information provided. I authorize OFE to contact my probation or parole officer to discuss my involvement with OFE. I permit OFE to retain this statement for its records.

Signature of applicant _____ Date _____

Exercise #15

Fill out the application form. You may not know the answers to all of the questions, so you can make them up if you don't. To protect your own privacy, don't list your real SIN number for this exercise. Make one up or leave it blank.

Now, read the form again carefully and answer the following questions:

What languages does Opportunities for Employment (OFE) use to communicate with their clients?

What are the three different types of contact information you must provide?

What questions on this form do you not have to answer if you don't want to?

Who does the applicant give OFE permission to contact if they sign this form?

Are there any words or phrases in this form you don't understand? Write them below.

Lesson #16

Who Can Help?: The Project Gang-Proof Resource Hotline

Many programs and organizations are willing to help gang members and their families, but it can be tough to choose between them. Everybody has different needs. Luckily, the Project Gang-Proof Resource Hotline is a one-stop shop for information about gangs. The hotline was set up by the Province of Manitoba to serve young people, parents, community members, and people involved with gangs.

When someone calls the hotline at 204-945-4264 (or toll-free at 1-800-691-4264), they reach an answering machine. The caller should leave their name, phone number, and some details about the type of information they need. For example, someone might call because they are a gang member looking to leave the life. Or maybe they are a parent who is worried about their child getting involved in gangs. They could be a community member who has spotted gang graffiti and isn't sure what to do about it.

The staff at the resource hotline can answer these callers' questions, or put them in touch with someone else who can. They can pass callers on to some of the community resources discussed in the last lesson. They are very knowledgeable about these different resources, so they will be able to tell which options will be best for the person calling.

Resource hotline staff can help gang members come up with a plan to leave. They will ask how old the caller is and which gang they are a part of. They might then put them in touch with resources in other neighbourhoods or communities, in case they need to move out of their neighbourhood or even out of their city in order to leave the gang.

Staff can also assist parents whose children are in gangs or who are thinking about joining gangs. They might hook callers up with groups like Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata

Centre or Ka Ni Kanichihk, Sport Manitoba, or other groups that offer positive activities for youth.

The resource hotline receives anywhere from two to fifteen phone calls per day, and tries to return all of its calls within one to three business days. Project Gang-Proof also has information online at www.gov.mb.ca/justice/safe/gangproof/index.html.





Exercise #16

The poster shown here was created by the Manitoba Government's Gang-Proof project. Gang-Proof runs the gang hotline discussed in the lesson.

Posters like this one are called public service announcements, or PSAs. While many ads try to sell a product, such as a car or clothing, PSAs try to “sell” an idea or a message, such as “Stay in school,” or “Don't drink and drive.”

Can you think of other public service announcements you've seen on TV, in magazines, or on bulletin boards? Make a list of some other messages or ideas you've seen in PSAs.

What is the message or idea that the PSA shown here is trying to get across to you?

Is this advertisement effective? Why or why not? Do you like this ad? If so, what do you like about it? If not, what do you dislike?

What would you make a PSA about if you had the chance? What issue is most important to you? Explain why you think it is important.

Lesson #17

Who Can Help: OPK

Ogijiita pimatiswin kinamatwin (OPK) is Ojibway for “warrior spirit.” Having a “warrior spirit” is not about war or violence, but rather about how we all must fight for the health and wellbeing of our communities.

One person who does this every day is Larry Morrisette. He runs a program called OPK in the North End of Winnipeg, where he offers a small group of street gang members a chance at a safer and better life.

Will gang members do “legit” work for a living if given the chance? Larry Morrisette thinks so. In fact, he knows it.

Larry’s team is made up of ten former gang members in their twenties, who have done about a hundred years of time behind bars combined. They aren’t interested in going back to jail now, though. They work for OPK, fixing up old houses as part of the North End Housing Project. They work alongside two Aboriginal elder tradesmen, who teach them everything they need to know about construction and renovation.

The pay isn’t much at only minimum wage, but Larry’s employees like the job because it’s safer than gang life and it teaches them new skills they can use on a resume in the future. The program has become very popular and usually has a long waiting list.

The OPK program is now about nine years old. Its workers have helped to rebuild North End neighbourhoods by fixing up dozens of homes. Many of the OPK employees are also now enrolled in classes at the University of Manitoba.

OPK is unique because it is designed especially for street gang members, but it is certainly not the only employment opportunity out there. Check the resources listing at the back of the book for other options.

Did You Know?

It costs \$450,000 per year to run the OPK program. Since OPK has 10 ex-gang members working for them, if you do the math that means it costs \$45,000 to give one person a job with OPK for a year.

It costs about \$80,000 to keep one person in federal prison for one year.

Yes, you read that right! It would be cheaper for the government to give a gang member a job than to put him in jail. The charts below show other things that the government spends money on each year, and how much it spends.

Expenses of the provincial government in 2009 (Government of Manitoba)

Item	Amount Spent Per Year
Health care	\$4.6 billion
Public Education	\$1.5 billion
Funding for colleges and universities	\$627 million
Infrastructure and transportation	\$614 million
Justice	\$420 million
Conservation	\$123 million
Energy and mines	\$72 million
Water stewardship	\$33 million
Adult education	\$28 million
Housing and community development	\$7 million

Editor's Note: Since we published this book, OPK has moved from the North End to the John Howard Society office on 583 Ellice Avenue. They no longer fix up houses but they still do job training and referrals.

Exercise #17

How much more money does it cost to keep a person in prison for one year than to give him a job with OPK?

If it costs \$45,000 to give one person a job with OPK, and \$450,000 to give 10 people jobs with OPK, how much would it cost to give 20 people jobs with OPK?

Pretend that you are working for the government, and have decided that you would like to expand the OPK program to give 20 people jobs instead of 10. You already have \$450,000 set aside for the program, but now you need to come up with the rest. Where will you get it? Look at the government spending charts in the Did You Know section, and decide which items you would reduce spending for in order to have enough for OPK.

How much did you take and from which items? Explain your choices below. Use end punctuation and full sentences.

Are there other items you could cut money from, besides the ones you chose above, if you wanted to make OPK even bigger?

If it was up to you, how many people would have jobs at OPK? Explain your answer.

Lesson #18

Who Can Help?: Just TV

Some rappers and hip hop artists make gang life out to be fun and glamorous. But hip hop doesn't have to be that way.

Just ask any of the 20 youth who have joined a program called Just TV, which is located at the Broadway Neighbourhood Centre in Winnipeg. They are learning to mix their own hip hop beats, make music videos, and perform live onstage. They use their music and art to express their emotions and tell their own stories. They do it all while sending positive and hopeful messages to their audience.

Just TV is an anti-gang program. Its goal is to work with young people ages 16-24 who are in gangs or who might be at risk of joining gangs because of where they live or who they hang around with. Many of the youth in the program are struggling in school, have trouble at home, or have been to jail.

The Just TV program provides them with a safe place to come two days a week, where they can learn to make music videos or other types of media projects with the help of specially trained staff members.

Participants learn to write song lyrics and scripts and operate technical equipment such as a recording studio or video editing software. They create their videos either on their own or in small groups, and they show off their talent at a community concert at the end of the year.

The videos cover many topics, including drug use and suicide, the problems with gang life, the hardships teens face on the streets or at home, losing friends or family members,

or even just overcoming challenges and never giving up.

Laura Johnson is the coordinator of the Just TV program. She is proud of the youth in her program and says it is important to let them know they are valuable, no matter what decisions they have made in the past.

“These are amazing individuals,” Laura says. “They have so much compassion. The first time somebody gets into the booth to record, they’re super-nervous. I watch them pull up their first recording and say, ‘Listen to this. How does this sound?’ and the other youth support them. These are amazing young people who got involved in something when they were really young and who have now been labelled as ‘bad’ or ‘criminal’. They’ve started to identify with that label, and sometimes they don’t have that self-worth, because all they’ve heard is negatives.”

The program helps youth to build up their confidence and self-worth by giving them the tools and skills they need to complete a big and important project.

“If they finish a video, nobody can take that from them,” says Laura. “A sense of individuality is important, especially for our gang-involved youth. They get to come here and be themselves and talk about the things that are important to them.”

Some participants love the program so much they decide they want to make music or music videos for a living. The program staff warn the youth that most people who make music never get rich and famous, but some youth also become interested in other parts of the music industry. Some hope to be producers, directors, or audio recording engineers. For many, this is a good reason to stay in school so that they can eventually go to college.

Some of the youth have had huge success with their projects. One young woman in the program won a \$5,000 cash prize from the Winnipeg Film Group to put toward the making of another music video. Another youth won a scholarship to go to the University of Winnipeg and study whatever he wants for free.

In addition to music and art, the program also teaches other skills. Instructors help youth with public speaking, filling out applications, making resumes, and hunting for apartments.

“This program is about opening as many doors for them as possible,” explains Laura. “We are helping to give them self confidence, give them a voice, and let them know there are other choices they can make. But ultimately, if the only thing we did in this program was gave them a safe place to be on Tuesdays and Thursdays where they can do something positive, that would be enough.”



Literacy Tip: Adjectives

A few lessons back, we learned about nouns. A noun is a word that names a person, place or thing. An adjective is a word that describes a noun.

To review, here are some examples of nouns from the story we just read:

gangs, Laura, youth, Just TV program

Adjectives help us to give the reader more information about the nouns we are talking about. What are gangs like? What sort of person is Laura? What's it like at the Just TV program?

The words underlined in these sentences are adjectives:

Gangs are dangerous, not fun or glamorous.

Laura is a kind and generous woman who works at the Just TV program.

The youth in the program are amazing.

The Just TV program is a safe place.

Many of the synonyms we discussed in Exercise #7 were adjectives. The words small, tiny, puny, miniscule, miniature, pint-sized, big, large, and humongous are all adjectives because they all describe something.

Adjectives can describe anything from what temperature something is (freezing, lukewarm, sweltering) to what something looks like (bright, beautiful, hideous, magnificent) to what kind of person someone is (shy, hilarious, conceited, caring).

Adjectives are an absolute must for telling stories and writing songs or poems. The more creative the adjective the better! Why say “bright” when you could say “radiant”? Why say “tall” when you could say “towering”? Why say “great” when you could say “stupendous,” “fantastic” or “incredible”? (Remember, “great”, “fantastic”, “stupendous” and “incredible” are all synonyms for each other, as are “bright” and “radiant,” and “tall” and “towering”).

Dictionaries and thesauruses are great tools for choosing adjectives. Using adjectives will make your writing more creative and more interesting to read.

Exercise #18

The youth at Just TV have found that working on creative projects can be a fun and healthy way to build self esteem and confidence. In this exercise, you'll have the opportunity to use some of the literacy skills you've learned so far to create a piece of creative writing.

Use the instructions below to write a bio poem, a poem that is all about you. Each number below represents a new line in your poem. (If you don't want to write about yourself, you could also write a poem about somebody else, such as a loved one or someone you admire, or even a make believe character or someone from a book or movie).

1. Your first name only
2. Three adjectives that describe you
3. [Adjective] and [adjective] (these adjectives should be synonyms)
4. [Adjective] as a [noun]
5. And [adjective] as a [noun]
6. Who loves [three different nouns]
7. Who fears [three different nouns]
8. Who wants [two different nouns]
9. Resident of [adjective] [noun]
10. Your last name only

First write your poem on a piece of scrap paper, if you have it. This way you can cross things out and change them if you wish. When you're finally happy with your poem, write it out in the blank space on the next page.

Here is an example of a bio poem you can use for help:

Sarah
Blue-eyed, spritely and adventurous
Inquisitive and curious
Bright as a star
And beautiful as a sunflower
Who loves songs, stories and chocolate pudding
Who fears snakes, spiders, and the start of the school year
Who wants world peace and a new hamster
Resident of snowy Winnipeg
Jameson

[illegible]

Don't forget that the John Howard Society publishes a literacy newsletter, the *Inside Scoop*, four times per year. The newsletter is filled with poetry, short stories, letters and artwork from our literacy students and other writers in jail. If you'd like to see a piece of your writing in print, be sure to talk to us about submitting it to the *Inside Scoop*!

Lesson #19

Turning the Tides

Turning the Tides is another example of a program that is trying to help youth who are in gangs or who may join gangs in the future. The program is offered by Ndinawe Resource Centre, which is located on Selkirk Avenue.

Turning the Tides is open to youth between the ages of 14 and 19, both male and female. At the time we wrote this book there were 25 youth in the program, and most were involved in gangs. The goal of the Turning the Tides program is to help these youth to make healthier life choices. Youth who come to the program are paired with a mentor, an older buddy who helps them to look for work, complete community service hours, get back into school, or get ID and other things they need.

“Everyone who works in this program comes from a street background on some level, and have healed from that,” explains program coordinator Melissa Omelan. “So we all understand the situations these kids get into. Even if we haven’t lived it ourselves, we can at least empathize with them.”

Almost all of the youth in the program are either in foster care or are fending for themselves, living without their parents or other adults. Most have been to jail and many have problems with drugs or alcohol. They are facing many challenges.

It’s important for the youth in the program to learn new skills. It’s also important for them to feel like they are a part of their community. Together, mentors and youth cut grass, clean up garbage, chip ice, and do odd jobs as part of the youths’ community service hours. Mentors also help youth to create resumes and set them up with job placements. Turning the Tides also offers programs like CPR courses and food-handler

trainings that will help youth prepare for employment.

Youth in the program take part in fun group activities such as movie nights, go-carting, and camping trips. They have the option of learning about spirituality and cultural teachings if they want.

Each youth works with their mentor to create a case plan. They decide what they are interested in and which parts of their lives they want to improve.

“Some of our participants will come in and flat-out tell you, ‘I don’t want to go to school,’” says one of the program’s mentors. “So you have to respect that, and you work with them on what they want to do. I can’t push my wants on you. But maybe when you’re ready, I might just plant a seed in your brain about education and training. Maybe five years from now you’ll decide you need that. But for now it’s about getting them to where they’re happy and doing what they want to do.”

Turning the Tides is just one example of a program that can help people who are in gangs, or people who are thinking about joining gangs. There are other examples in the resources section at the back of this workbook.

Editor’s Note: Unfortunately, Ndinawe’s *Turning the Tides* program was one of a handful of Winnipeg gang prevention programs that did not receive a renewal of their government funding. When the program’s start-up funding ran out in the spring of 2011, *Turning the Tides* was forced to close its doors.

“They’re Not the Hell’s Angels” Basic needs fuel gangs, activist says

By Gabrielle Giroday, Winnipeg Free Press
May 5, 2010

Melissa Omelan's job description is both daunting and critical for a city rocked by a wave of violent gang-related crime.

She's the one leading a program that works with the prime targets for gangs, kids who sell drugs or carry weapons like hammers. Under her watch are two dozen teenagers who are currently in gangs or at risk of joining. Her mission is to keep them from joining, or if they are already in a gang, get them out.

The project co-ordinator of Ndinawe's Turning the Tides gang-prevention program doesn't portray the teenagers in the program as "angels."

However, she says many Winnipeggers don't comprehend that gang involvement is a way for impoverished teenagers to meet their basic needs. About 60 per cent of the kids she works with are actively involved in gang life, many through their families.

"People don't understand the pressures... we ask these kids 'leave your gang' but we're asking them to isolate themselves from their communities and their families," she said. "That's a really hard thing to ask a kid to do, because when they do that, then what? What do we do with them? Where do they go? Who's their support system?"

Ndinawe, at 472 Selkirk Ave., is in one of the city's most impoverished areas. The program works with kids aged 14 to 19 years old for months or years teaching them employment or life skills.

The program has three other staff members, including 35-year-old mentor Matt Kelly, who stresses that gangs don't attract "bad kids."

The program brings in speakers, and helps kids set up with legal appointments.

"It's very environmental," he said.

Omelan said jailing kids in their teen years only makes them "better criminals" after they're forced to live in a survival-of-the-fittest environment.

Omelan said teens who are dealing small amounts of crack cocaine or marijuana to make money for groceries, clothes or their sibling's diapers don't have an immediate solution if they leave.

"I think poverty's a huge issue. I think that a lot of these kids, there's this conception that aboriginal street gangs are ruining Winnipeg, and they're at the core of everything bad in the North End, and really, when we talk about crime, we're looking at pettiness," she said.

"They're not the Manitoba Warriors or the Hells Angels, who are moving huge amounts of drugs, who are trafficking women. A lot of these kids, it's how they're taught to meet their basic needs or help their families meet their basic needs."

In the gang hierarchy, they're likely to be the lower rungs of the organization, known as "strikers" in street slang.

"They're usually selling minimal amounts of drugs for someone else, or their family is heavily connected and they're kind-of on the outskirts," she said.

Teens who choose to distance themselves lose the physical protection a gang offers, which was part of the initial allure. She said the vast majority of teens in the program who carry weapons like hammers do so for protection, not to maliciously hurt others.

"(Take) a youth who's trying to do the right thing, and take his bus to school, getting jumped and having his head smashed into the concrete," she said.

"You're not only facing the retaliation of the gang you're leaving, but there's still people from opposing gangs who may feel you're still connected so now you're dealing with it from two sides."

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Exercise #19

Read the *Winnipeg Free Press* article, “They’re Not the Hells Angels,” which appeared in the May 28, 2010 edition of the newspaper. Answer the questions below using full sentences:

What is the main idea of this article? If you had to describe what it is about to a friend in just one or two sentences, what would you say?

What is Melissa Omelan's goal in her job?

Throughout the article, Melissa mentions several reasons that kids might join gangs. What is one of them?

Do you agree with what Melissa has to say about youth gangs in Winnipeg's North End?
Why or why not?

Lesson #20

If You Want to Change Violence in the ‘Hood...

Many people are worried about the violence and gangs in Winnipeg's inner-city. One small group of worried people decided to do a study on gangs in the North End. One of those people was Larry Morrisette, who runs the OPK program discussed in Lesson #17. The other three were university professors who are experienced in doing research on crime and other social problems.

The researchers had meetings with six members of a North End street gang. They asked the gang members for their opinions on how our city can keep people out of gangs and reduce violence in our neighbourhoods. The gang members had a lot to say on how we could make our city safer and fix Winnipeg's gang problem.

The gang members had important things to say about getting “tough on crime”. They agreed that if they commit crimes, they have to do the time. But they also said that simply putting more people in jail will not solve the problem of gangs and violence in the North End.

“All you're going to do is slow us down a little bit,” one said. “And the next day someone else gets out of prison and the same shit starts again.”

Prison doesn't usually help the people who go there. Some gang members stated that prison only “teaches you street smarts” and “turns you into a better criminal.”

Prison also doesn't solve the problems that create gangs and crime in the first place: mainly poverty and racism. The men who were interviewed grew up where abuse, neglect, hunger, drugs, crime, and gang life were “normal” parts of their every day lives.

One told the researchers about watching his father cut up illegal drugs on the kitchen table when he was ten years old. Another described being eight years old and having to be home at 2:00am, since that's when his parents got back from the bar. He was drinking regularly by the time he was nine. Still another remembered breaking into a storage building with a group of friends and stealing potato chips because there was no food at home. They ate potato chips all weekend because there was nothing else to eat.

The media talk often about gang violence. But they don't talk very often about the poverty and other problems that are producing the violence. The public want a stop to the violence, but there may be no quick solution.

One of the gang members interviewed said, “There ain't no 'cure.' You can't take an aspirin for the North End and it'll be over in a half hour.”

So what would help? The men interviewed had many ideas about that, too.

“If you want to change violence in the 'hood,” one said. “You have to change the 'hood.”

It's not enough to punish the people who are committing crimes and being violent. You need to change the environment they are living in, so that more people don't grow up that way.

One way to do this is create more jobs for people in the North End, and for former gang members. As we saw with Reymundo's story in Lesson #14, it can be terrifying for an ex-gang member to walk into a “regular” workplace. If we want gang members to choose work over gang life, we need to offer them the types of jobs that they will do and be good at. The OPK program is a great example of this. Inner-City Renovations and

BUILD are other programs in the North End that work with young people who might otherwise join gangs.

Perhaps some street gang members could be hired as “spokespersons for something different.” They could speak to groups of kids, or work one-to-one with youth who may be at risk of getting into gangs.

The six men who were interviewed also talked about the importance of investing government money into the inner city. They were angry about the fact that there are so few community recreation centres available for North End kids. There aren't many places where kids can go when they need someone to talk to because things aren't going well at home.

There should be more programs of all kinds, they said, for children, youth, parents and families.

The gang members in this study are part of the problem, and they know that. But they also want to be part of the solution. Maybe their advice could be used to help fix the gang problem in the North End. After all, who would know better about how to stop gang violence than gangsters themselves?

Literacy Tip: Writing a Business Letter

People communicate by email more often than by letter these days, but there are still many situations where you will need to write a letter. You might write a letter if you are applying for a job, making a complaint, or asking for permission to do something.

Here is an example of a letter we wrote to ask permission to reprint an article in this workbook:

Jacquie Nicholson
John Howard Society of Manitoba
583 Ellice Avenue
Winnipeg, MB R3B 1Z7

August 20, 2010

Steve Lastname
Winnipeg Free Press Permissions Department
1355 Mountain Avenue
Winnipeg, MB R2X 3B6

Dear Mr. Lastname:

I am writing to request your permission to reprint the article, "They're Not the Hells Angels" by Gabrielle Giroday, which appeared in the May 28, 2010 edition of the Winnipeg Free Press.

I will be using this article in an educational workbook I am writing for the students in the John Howard Society literacy program. The John Howard Society is a non-profit agency that provides services to inmates and ex-inmates. My program is located at the Winnipeg Remand Centre and my students are adult male inmates who have voluntarily signed up to improve their reading, writing and math skills.

We create some of our own learning materials for our literacy students, including a series of workbooks on topics they find interesting. Some examples of topics include communication, substance use, parenting and anger. The book I am hoping to use your article in is a book on gang awareness. I'm planning to use the article in a reading and writing exercise in one of the book's chapters.

If you have any further questions about this request, please contact me at 775-1514 ext. 303. Thank you for considering my request.

Sincerely,

Jacquie Nicholson
Literacy Program Coordinator, John Howard Society

Exercise #20

Imagine that the neighbourhood you live in has just elected a new city councillor, Kendra Surname. Her number one mission is to try to make the area safer and reduce the number of people joining gangs. She has asked community members for their advice.

Write her a letter giving her your opinion about how to cut down on the number of people joining gangs and the amount of gang violence and crime. If you want, you can use suggestions from the lesson, but you should also try to use your own ideas. What do you think would help make the city a safer place, and keep youth out of gangs?

There are two pages for letter-writing here but you don't have to fill them both. Your letter can be as long or as short as you like.

Divide your letter up into paragraphs, as we discussed in Exercise #11. Don't forget to put a greeting and a closing on your letter.



[illegible]

Resources:

Here are just some of the resources available to gang members and their families. Some of these resources will also be helpful to people who are not involved in gangs but who are looking for work, recreation, or other opportunities.

Help Lines

Contact Community Information
287-8827
1-866-266-4636

This community information centre links people with the required agency or service that can assist them. They maintain a provincial database on health, welfare, social services, educational, cultural and recreational activities throughout Manitoba.

Learnline
947-5757 or toll-free at 1-866-947-5757

The Learnline is for adults who are looking for a place to continue their education. Whether you need help with very basic reading and writing skills or help completing a Grade 12 diploma, the Learnline is the number to call. Learnline staff will help students to find a learning program in the community that is right for them.

Project Gang-Proof Resource Hotline
945-4264 or toll-free at 1-800-691-4264

This hotline was discussed earlier in this workbook. It helps gang members, their families, and others deal with gang-related issues.

Manitoba Suicide Prevention
1-877-435-7170

The Suicide Prevention Line is available to Manitobans experiencing suicidal thoughts, or those who are concerned that a family member or friend may be at risk, as well as those grieving the loss of someone from suicide.

Arts, Culture and Recreation

Art City

Art City is a community art centre offering free high quality arts programming to people of all ages.

775-9856

Graffiti Art Programming

This is a not-for-profit community youth art centre located in the core area of Winnipeg, using art as a tool for community, social, economic and individual growth.

667-9960

Broadway Neighbourhood Centre

Offers a variety of recreational and cultural programs to the Broadway community.

772-9253

185 Young Street

Employment

Opportunities for Employment

Offers a range of services to job-hunters, including trainings and workshops, resume-writing, and help making contacts with employers.

300-294 Portage Ave.

204-925-3490

Centre for Aboriginal Human Resource Development (CAHRD)

CAHRD has employment counsellors who can assist with job preparation, including interview skills, resume-writing, and referrals. They also link clients up with education and training opportunities.

989-7110

304-181 Higgins Avenue

P.A.T.H. Centre

Aims to assist North End residents with finding employment. P.A.T.H. offers discussion groups, free computer and Internet access, and a career assessment test.

927-2300

Partners for Careers

Assists Aboriginal job-seekers in finding employment. In addition to working with CAHRD in Winnipeg, they have services offered out of 10 friendship centres outside the city. Call 942-6299 for more information.

Partners @ 510 Selkirk

Partners is a resource centre that keeps information on all of the programs and social services available to Manitobans, including employment, training and education. They host the website Aboriginal Youth Mean Business!, which is a directory of all of the services that exist throughout Manitoba to help aboriginal youth and adults start or grow a business. The website is at <http://www.aymb.ca>.

945-0447

510 Selkirk Avenue

Addictions Treatment Programs

Addictions Foundation of Manitoba

Provides assessments and a variety of addiction programs. AFM offers services in Brandon and Thompson as well as Winnipeg.

944-6235

or toll free at 1-866-638-2568

Behavioural Health Foundation

Provides long-term residential treatment programming for men, women, teens and family units experiencing addiction problems.

269-3430

Native Addictions Council of Manitoba

Provides Aboriginal people with counselling, information, and referrals on alcohol and drug abuse, gambling, and other addictions.

586-8395

Main Street Project

Offers emergency shelter and food services, a drug and alcohol detoxification unit, transitional housing, and on-site counselling.

982-8245

75 Martha Street

Counselling, Parenting Programs

The Family Centre

The centre provides individual, couple, and family counselling. Offers parenting education courses and support for families in crisis.

947-1401

Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre

This centre provides support and resources for aboriginal children and families, including parenting support groups and family violence prevention. There are three locations in Winnipeg.

925-0300

Klinic

Klinic Community Health Centre offers free drop-in counselling at two locations: 545 Broadway or 845 Regent Avenue West. You can talk about relationships, depression, family violence, anxiety, anger, sexual issues or sexual orientation, alcohol use, grief or loss, basically any problem that may be affecting your life.

784-4067

Literacy and Adult Education Centres

LiteracyWORKS Incorporated
786-1212
230-500 Portage Avenue

This program provides adults with the opportunity to develop and improve basic literacy skills in reading, writing, spelling and basic math. Students receive tutoring on a one-to-one basis by trained volunteers and learning plans are customized to the student's goals. They are open both during days and evenings, and students can register at any time of year.

Open Doors Adult Literacy Programming
586-1878
825 Selkirk Avenue

Open doors offers classes two mornings, four afternoons, and two evenings per week. This program assists students with basic literacy, computer skills, and GED preparation. Coffee and snacks are provided during each session and babysitting is available on site free of charge. Open doors also has a summer program that runs for six weeks during July and August.

Aboriginal Community Campus
989-8860
403-181 Higgins Avenue

This centre offers both upgrading and academic programs. Upgrading means helping learners to bring their reading, writing and math skills up to a Grade 10 level. The academic program offers learners the chance to obtain their Mature Student Grade 12 diploma, where eight credits are required to graduate. Students can join at anytime, and the centre continues to run during the summer months.

Horizons Learning Centre
772-1234
Located in Portage Place Mall, 222 Furby Street, and 431 Thames Avenue

Learners may complete their Mature Grade 12 diploma, improve employability skills, or complete the credits they need to get into college or university. The centres are open during the afternoons and evenings as well as during the summer.

Louis Riel Institute Adult Learning Centre
984-9480
103-150 Henry Avenue

This centre offers high school credits to allow students to complete their Mature Grade 12. Some courses are classroom-based, while others are independent study. Louis Riel Institute is a Metis-focused Adult Learning Centre, but all adult learners are welcome to attend.

Youth

Resource Assistance for Youth (RaY)

RaY is an agency that works with street-involved and homeless youth, including gang members and former gang members, and youth involved in the sex trade. For RaY, “youth” includes anyone up to age 29. Their programs include health services, a food bank, access to laundry, showers and clothing, assistance with finding housing, and arts and recreation programs.

783-5617
125 Sherbrook Street

MacDonald Youth Services' Youth Resource Centre

The centre provides short-term shelter, food and clothing for youth aged 12 to 17, as well as informal counselling. The centre is open 24 hours per day, seven days per week.

477-8581

Street Connections

Street Connections helps street-involved youth, including drug users, street youth, and youth involved in the sex trade. They offer health services, meals, clean needle exchanges, and many other services.

943-6379
50 Argyle Street

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Workbook Evaluation Form

Please take the time to fill out the form below and tell us what you thought of this workbook. Your feedback will help us in developing new workbooks in the future.

Did you enjoy doing this workbook? Why or why not?

Did you learn anything you didn't already know?

Was the reading: Too easy? _____ Too difficult? _____ Just right? _____

Were there any activities in this book that you found were too difficult?

Were there any activities or chapters that you really liked?

What other topics would you like to learn about in a workbook?
