

EXPANDING OPPORTUNITY AND ERASING BARRIERS:
TATTOO REMOVAL AS A GANG TRANSITION STRATEGY

By

Keiler Beers, Claire Collins, and Maricela Sanchez-Garcia

State of the State for Washington Latinos

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Introduction

At first glance, Walla Walla is a picturesque small town with wineries and upscale restaurants. As such, it may seem a surprise that even in a city of 30,000 people, gang activity is increasing. In response to community concern over gangs, the Walla Walla Community Council, a local organization that researches and publishes a report on a different community issue each year, focused its 2010-2011 report on “Reducing Gang Membership Through Prevention.” The discussion became even more critical when, in the spring of that year, Walla Walla saw its first gang-related homicide in a shoot-out between two local gangs, Florencia 13 and 18th Street.

Walla Walla is not unique in this matter. Across the state of Washington, there has been an increase in gang activity in recent years, and some estimates identify gangs as contributing up to 48% of violent crimes in the United States.¹ Indeed, Walla Walla may seem to be a curious site for an investigation of gang activity, given that it is not a big city notorious for gang violence such as Los Angeles or Chicago. But the 2011 homicide, and the community’s subsequent call for more gang regulation, demonstrates that even in a small town like Walla Walla, gangs play a powerful role in shaping how the community views its marginalized members. Thus, any exploration of local gangs must also take into account the double marginalization that many Latino gang members face. After all, many already associate all Latinos with immigrants, whom they see as a drain on our nation’s economy and as culturally inferior.

Additionally, because of events like the 2011 murder, communities typically perceive gangs with fear and suspicion. However, even among gang members who have made the

¹ Irvin Wei Jian Wong, Doreen Peirong Toh, Perrine Pui Leng Hung, Rebecca P. Ang, “Delinquency in Gangs — Selection or Socialization?,” *Aggression & Violent Behavior* 18, no. 6 (2013): 784-791.

decision to leave the gang, many experience a difficult and often stigmatized journey as they transition into a new life in their community. Locally, community members like Sergio Hernandez recognized the complications of this transition for former gang members. Hernandez and other community members founded INK-OUT in 2013 to help individuals remove their tattoos that represent markings of their gang-affiliated past. That summer, the program accepted its first participants, and operated laser surgery on almost twenty individuals in the following months. Our team partnered with Hernandez and the INK-OUT program to perform extensive interviews with the participants to hear how their personal histories led them to the program. Hernandez gave us access to these stories by introducing our team to the participants. INK-OUT, while still in its infancy, eagerly anticipates further expansion of services.

Our investigation focused on the circumstances that lead individuals to join gangs: the motivations for participation in a tattoo removal program, and how these programs facilitate the transition away from gangs. As we show in the next section of this report, limited research has been done on tattoo removal programs for former gang members and even less on the long term effects of tattoo removal. After researching secondary literature, we interviewed thirteen INK-OUT participants, two mentors, and seven members in the community. We found that the participants joined gangs to fulfill legitimate emotional needs such as kinship and belonging caused by adversity in their childhoods. We discovered that while tattoo removal is an important form of reintegration for former gang members, it cannot be the sole component. Instead, many participants suggested counseling and job training as additional components that could be incorporated into the INK-OUT program.

As we discuss in the report's conclusion, these findings have implications for actors on

the federal, state and local level, including participants themselves. Systemic change in the form of economic support for traditionally marginalized groups is essential if we seek to address the root causes of gang membership. In general, funding should be directed towards efforts to steer young people away from gangs, instead of harsh measures to punish those who do choose to affiliate. In Walla Walla, we determined that INK-OUT is a positive resource for those seeking to transition out of gangs, and found promising signs of progress for the future. While Walla Walla is a small town in rural eastern Washington, it is one of the only programs of its kind in all of the Pacific Northwest. Hopefully, our research on INK-OUT will encourage other cities in the state to create tattoo removal programs.

Literature Review:

Our research enters into an ongoing academic conversation about gangs: specifically, what leads youth to join, their eventual motivations for leaving, and the difficulties facing these former members as they seek to transition out of the gang. There are multiple, and frequently competing, sociological theories on the patterns of delinquency and adverse childhood experiences that can engender gang membership. Research shows that upon joining, gang members face severe stigma in their communities and conflict with the police, often due to the tattoos they receive as part of their initiation. Among those who decide to exit, many experience difficulties integrating into their communities. Tattoo removal is an increasingly popular method for addressing the complex process of assisting individuals as they transition from being a gang member to a non-affiliated community member. However, there is relatively little research on its particular efficacy as a method for facilitating this transition, as well as the long-term effects on

former gang members' lives. In order to address the complexities of gang exit, we hope to provide a clear understanding of what tattoos signify for people who get them, and thus what it means for people to decide to have them removed.

Adverse Childhood Experiences at Home and in School

The factors influencing gang involvement starts at a young age, in the homes and the schools of youth. Households that have absentee parents or abuse can negatively impact the lives of children. In their case study of Latina gang members in the San Francisco Bay area, Geoffrey Hunt et al. state that, "The absence of a strong and vibrant sense of belonging... creat[es] a lack of attachment between parent and child."² Hunt et al. argue that when parents impose their traditional values and gender norms onto their female children it may create a division between them. This detachment between the child and the parent may encourage the child to seek support from a surrogate family, which often is a gang. In addition, trouble at home can also have a negative effect on students at school. From their national surveys and personal interviews which aimed to determine the influence of family on schools, Shannon Cavanagh and Paula Fomby report that, "family instability is associated with young people's academic achievement."³ This evidence illustrates that family environment may interfere in preparing youth for school, and thus may lead them to find comfort in gangs that they were never able to find at home or in school.

Students who come from unstable homes may feel targeted by school administrators.

However, in a study based on interviews, focus groups, observations and workshops with gang-

² Geoffrey Hunt, Kathleen Mackenzie, and Karen Joe-Laidler, "'I'm calling my mom': the meaning of family and kinship among homegirls," *JQ: Justice Quarterly* 17, (2000): 5.

³ Shannon E. Cavanagh and Paula Fomby, "Family Instability, School Context, and the Academic Careers of Adolescents," *Sociology Of Education* 85, no.1 (2012): 83.

associated youth, Victor M. Rios argues that students are not completely to blame for their disruptive behavior at school because “Consistent negative interactions with school officials [lead] many of the young men...to understand school as an unsafe space.”⁴ Students who do not feel safe in school may try to find this protection in gangs. Similarly, Susan Roberta Katz conducted focus groups with Latinos students and learned that in school, “These kids didn’t do anything, but they were guilty. They were outlaws in a place that did not want them, a place that pushed them out at every opportunity.”⁵ Rios and Katz show that lack of support for Latino youth in school can affect their academics because they are not given the chance to demonstrate their worth and abilities. Thus, many young people experience the same isolation they found at home in their schools, compounding the factors that lead them to join a gang.

These youth often experience stigma at school because of policies that dictate how educators discipline their students. In their gang prevention model, Sharkey et al. contend that schools can combat the allure that gangs have by paying attention to all of their students instead of just those who are excelling academically.⁶ Sharkey et al. recommend that, “it is critical for schools to eliminate zero tolerance approaches to discipline and adopt school-wide positive behavior support with fair, consistent, and constructive discipline procedures.”⁷ Sometimes school policies can exclude marginalized populations such as gangs, preventing them from

⁴ Victor M. Rios, "Navigating the Thin Line between Education and Incarceration: An Action Research Case Study on Gang-Associated Latino Youth," *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 15, no. 1-2 (2010): 2.

⁵ Susan Roberta Katz, "Presumed Guilty: How Schools Criminalize Latino Youth," *Social Justice* 24, no. 4 (January 1, 1997): 93.

⁶ Jill D. Sharkey et al, "The protective influence of gangs: Can schools compensate?" *Aggression & Violent Behavior* 16, no. 1 (2011): 45.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 53.

receiving the same opportunities. Through research focused on homophobic bullying, Dominique Johnson identified that the enforcement of school policies can be one of the factors that *encourage* gang behavior. Johnson explains that, “In theory, [policies] ensure students’ safety. But in practice, they were apparently not employed or selectively applied.”⁸ This evidence shows that when policies fail to protect or serve young people, some may choose to join a gang in the hopes of finding the support they were denied both in school and at home.

Motivations for Joining a Gang and Getting Tattoos

While these adverse experiences both at home and in school may lead some towards gang involvement, there is no unified trajectory that guides this decision. Through extensive interviews with former gang members, Luiz Bazan et. al argue against “the tendency to oversimplify the complex reasons any individual may have for joining a gang.”⁹ For example, Pamela Lachman et al.’s survey of two hundred youth gang members showed an important divergence; while some join for instrumental reasons, including easier access to drugs and crime, others may join for interpersonal reasons such as seeking acceptance.¹⁰ David Curry et al.’s analysis of self-reported and official data on inner-city minority adolescents corroborates this conclusion, showing that significant differences exist in the motivations for joining a gang.¹¹

⁸ Dominique Johnson, "Taking Over the School: Student Gangs as a Strategy for Dealing with Homophobic Bullying in an Urban Public School District," *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services* 19, no. 3-4 (2007): 95-96.

⁹ Luis Enrique Bazan, Liliana Harris, and Lois Ann Lorentzen, “Migrant Gangs, Religion and Tattoo Removal,” *Peace Review* 14, no. 4 (2002): 379–383.

¹⁰ Pamela Lachman, Caterina G. Roman, and Meagan Cahill, “Assessing Youth Motivations for Joining a Peer Group as Risk Factors for Delinquent and Gang Behavior,” *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice* 11, no. 3 (2013): 212–229.

¹¹ G. David Curry and Irving A. Spergel, “Gang Involvement and Delinquency Among Hispanic and African-American Adolescent Males,” *Journal of Research in Crime & Delinquency* 29, no. 3 (1992): 273–291.

Bazan et al. find that, despite a diversity of motivations, few gang members identified peer pressure as a factor in their decision to affiliate. Rather, the most common reason was the desire for kinship and belonging, as shown by two additional independent studies.¹²

Many gang members, upon joining, decide to mark their bodies with a tattoo that symbolizes their new affiliation.¹³ Most scholars agree that tattoos, regardless of their connection to a gang, tattoos are used as a part of the individual's identity or a representation of a past event of great importance. Katherine Irwin's interviews over a four-year period at a tattoo parlor found "getting tattoos at major life transitions served as permanent reminders of lessons learned, milestones accomplished, and personal growth gained".¹⁴ Each of these explanations could resonate with the experience of a gang member. A rite of passage could be their initiation into the gang, while a "milestone accomplished" could be the fulfillment of a certain criminal act. Additionally, Margo DeMello states that, "tattoos provide [individuals] a sense of fulfillment, identity, and control."¹⁵ Thus, tattoos serve as a way of further solidifying an individual's new identity within a gang.

For many gang members, tattoos may represent their pride in their *barrio* (neighborhood), or may simply be the product of establishing a gang identity. Furthermore, tattoos can also depend on their rank and standing in the gang. Michael P. Phelan, in his case

¹² Pamela C. Regan, "The Search for Family: Adolescent Males' Motives for Joining Gangs," *Free Inquiry in Creative Sociology* 24, no. 1 (May 1996): 25–27; Craig Hochhaus and Frank Sousa, "Why Children Belong to Gangs: A Comparison of Expectations and Reality," *The High School Journal* 71, no. 2 (1987): 74–77.

¹³ Reflecting the style of prior scholarship, we use the term "affiliation" hereafter in our report to refer to "gang affiliation." Similarly, "membership" refers to "gang membership."

¹⁴ Katherine Irwin, "Legitimizing the First Tattoo: Moral Passage through Informal Interaction," *Symbolic Interaction* 24, no. 1 (2001): 61.

¹⁵ Margo DeMello, "Not Just For Bikers Anymore": Popular Representations of American Tattooing," *Journal of Popular Culture* 29, no. 3 (1995): 43.

study of prison gang tattoos, discovered that the Nuestra Familia gang consists of five sections, and that members' tattoos are determined on their rank in this hierarchy, as well as their accomplishments within the gang.¹⁶ Phelan reported that gang tattoos help form their definition of their self-identity in prison.¹⁷ Conversely, Susan Phillips contends that many are intended as security measures to identify others in the same gang when they are in prison or on the streets.¹⁸ While scholars seem to differ as to whether getting a tattoo is an act of self-representation or provoked by a need for safety, they do demonstrate that tattoos are infused with deep meaning within gangs.

Models Predicting Gang Delinquency

Regardless of whether or not they choose to get a tattoo, there is extensive literature suggesting that once in a gang, members engage in criminal behaviors. Given that some estimate gangs accounting for an average of 48% of violent crimes in the United States, it is critical to examine the factors that lead gang members to commit these crimes.¹⁹ Finn-Aage Esbensen et al.'s longitudinal study of young gang members showed that delinquency preceded membership, though it did increase during the period of affiliation²⁰. On the other hand, Sara Battin et al.'s analysis of crime rates among gang members claims that despite this spike in delinquent

¹⁶ Michael P. Phelan and Scott A. Hunt, "Prison Gang Members' Tattoos as Identity Work: The Visual Communication of Moral Careers," *Symbolic Interaction* 21, no. 3 (1998).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 278.

¹⁸ Susan A. Phillips, "Gallo's Body: Decoration and Damnation in the Life of a Chicano Gang Member," *Ethnography* 2, no. 3 (2001): 361.

¹⁹ Wong et al. "Delinquency in Gangs — Selection or Socialization?," 784-791.

²⁰ Finn-Aage Esbensen and David Huizinga, "Gangs, Drugs, and Delinquency in a Survey of Urban Youth," *Criminology* 31, no. 4 (1993): 565-589.

behavior upon joining, most do not previously exhibit significantly high rates of delinquency.²¹

Thus, while scholars disagree on whether delinquency precedes gang membership, there is an undisputed link between affiliation and subsequent criminal activity.

Thornberry et al. provides a useful analysis of three different models that explain this connection between delinquency and gang activity, and each are supported in isolation by other scholars.²² The first theory is the Selection model, which suggests that gangs attract members who are inclined to delinquent behavior, and thus gang youth may have a prior disposition to crime. Esbensen et al.'s research refutes this claim, however, demonstrating that no significant psychological difference exists between gang and non-gang youth.²³ Next, the Social Facilitation model suggests that affiliation causes the development of delinquent behavior. This view suggests that criminal acts are the unavoidable result of actions that are associated with being in a gang, such as having to deface public property as part of one's gang initiation.

The third, the Enhancement Model, is a synthesis of both models, and suggests that gangs comprise a group of people with prior delinquent tendencies; consequently, membership exacerbates and even necessitates this continued delinquency.²⁴ Although there is no clear

²¹ Sara R. Battin et al., "The Contribution of Gang Membership to Delinquency Beyond Delinquent Friends," *Criminology* 36, no. 1 (1998): 93–116.

²² Terence P. Thornberry, Marvin D. Krohn, Alan J. Lizotte and Deborah Chard-Wierschem, "The Role of Juvenile Gangs in Facilitating Delinquent Behavior," *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 30, no. 1 (1993): 55–87; Rachel A. Gordon et al., "Antisocial Behavior and Youth Gang Membership: Selection and Socialization," *Criminology* 42, no. 1 (2004): 55–88.

²³ Esbensen et al. "Gangs, Drugs and Delinquency" 565-589.

²⁴ Uberto Gatti, Richard E. Tremblay, Frank Vitaro and Pierre McDuff, "Youth Gangs, Delinquency and Drug Use: a Test of the Selection, Facilitation, and Enhancement Hypotheses," *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, and Allied Disciplines* 46, no. 11 (2005): 1178–1190; Mons Bendixen, Inger M. Endresen, and Dan Olweus, "Joining and Leaving Gangs Selection and Facilitation Effects on Self-Reported Antisocial Behaviour in Early Adolescence," *European Journal of Criminology* 3, no. 1 (2006): 85–114; John W. Welte Lening Zhang, "Youth Gangs, Drug Use, and Delinquency," *Journal of Criminal Justice* 27, no. 3 (1999): 101–109,

consensus on which theory is correct, the Enhancement Model seems to most adequately address the complexity of the factors influencing crime, instead of reducing delinquency to only one narrow set of causes.

Negative Consequences of Gang Membership

While gang members' involvement in criminal activity has multiple causes, local perceptions of gangs can have their own independent effects on gangs' position in their community. In her research on Chicano youth gangs, Marjorie Zatz analyzed two decades of Phoenix media reports, which focused on the erroneous belief by locals that violence had increased as gang activity rose, even though crime rates actually decreased during that time. She suggests that community members viewed Chicano youth gangs as inherently foreign, and that the perceived cultural and racial otherness of these youth fed baseless fears about rising gang-related crime. Fear of this crime, in a vicious cycle, exacerbated the same popular notions of gang members' otherness.²⁵ Zatz uses Hall et al.'s concept of a "moral panic", defined as a discrepancy between a threat and its reaction, to describe the community's response to these youth, illuminating how the perception of crime can result in fear and political subordination through harsh laws targeting young Latino gang members.²⁶ Non-white youth endure particular discrimination from the common, but erroneous, perception of gang members as indiscriminately

²⁵ Marjorie S. Zatz, "Chicano Youth Gangs and Crime: The Creation of a Moral Panic," *Contemporary Crises* 11, no. 2 (June 1, 1987): 152.

²⁶ Stuart Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis : Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* (London: Macmillan, 1978).

violent, targeting innocent people in middle-upper class neighborhoods.²⁷ After all, previous scholarship shows stereotypes associating Latinos and crime have a direct impact on attitudes towards criminal punishment.²⁸

Because the police are responsible for responding to gang-related crime, their actions often color the community perception of gang members. As such, an analysis of the relationship between police officers and gang members is vital to understand the social position of gangs in the community. The past two decades saw a significant shift towards increased gang suppression by law enforcement.²⁹ While specific tactics vary by region, the general purpose of suppression is to deter gang activity by employing swifter, and more severe, punishments.³⁰ The efficacy of these strategies, as well as more draconian penalties, is disputed, however; evidence suggests that gang members do not necessarily respond to increased punishment.³¹

This unresponsiveness may be in part due to gang members' attitudes towards law enforcement. Marginalized youth display feelings of mistrust and resentment towards government officials, including police. In addition, scholarship suggests that such youth believe that police do not want to help them, which is why they choose not to rely on police for

²⁷ Carol Y. Thompson, Robert L. Young, and Ronald Burns, "Representing Gangs in the News: Media Constructions of Criminal Gangs," *Sociological Spectrum* 20, no. 4 (October 2000): 409–432; James Short, "Gangs and Adolescence," *Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence Institute of Behavioral Science University of Colorado, Boulder* (1996).

²⁸ Brian D. Johnson et al., "Ethnic Threat and Social Control: Examining Public Support for Judicial Use of Ethnicity in Punishment," *Criminology* 49, no. 2 (2011): 401–441

²⁹ Charles Katz and Vincent Webb, "Policing gangs in an era of community policing," chap. 2 in *Policing gangs and youth violence*, ed. Scott Decker (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2003).

³⁰ Judith Greene and Kevin Pranis, *Gang Wars: The Failure of Enforcement Tactics and the Need for Effective Public Safety Strategies* (Washington, DC: Justice Policy Institute, 2007).

³¹ Cheryl L. Maxson, Kristy N. Matsuda, and Karen Hennigan, "'Deterrability' Among Gang and Nongang Juvenile Offenders: Are Gang Members More (or Less) Deterrable Than Other Juvenile Offenders?" *Crime & Delinquency* 57, no. 4 (2011): 516–543.

protection.³² Zatz's research shows that gangs often see police as outsiders, and as an exterior, threatening force to their community.³³ Similarly, Deanna Wilkinson et al.'s interviews with young gang members reveal that "many youth feel justified in being involved in crime because they view the system as failing to make their neighborhoods safe."³⁴ In this case, criminal acts constitute both a form of self-help and a pursuit of retributive justice. When young people try to ensure their safety in this way, however, they make themselves vulnerable to stigmatization and mistreatment by the community. Despite the animosity indicated by this research, many gang members articulate a desire for increased police presence, so long as officers are more equitable in their treatment.³⁵ Until then, gang members choose to engage in crime instead of enduring what they see as discriminatory and oppressive treatment.

Nevertheless, this avenue for pursuing justice through the gang is often not enough to combat the difficulties that accompany membership, and some members end up reconsidering their presence within the gang. Research demonstrates that these reasons for leaving are complicated and varying. In a sample of eight-four former gang members detained in a juvenile prison in Arizona, David C. Pyrooz et al. found that roughly two out of three reported leaving their gang because of violence and internal conflict. In addition, interviewees decided to exit

³² Michelle Fine et al., "'Anything Can Happen With Police Around': Urban Youth Evaluate Strategies of Surveillance in Public Places," *Journal of Social Issues* 59, no. 1 (2003): 141–158; Sinead Gormally and Ross Deuchar, "Somewhere Between Distrust and Dependence: Young People, the Police and Anti-Social Behaviour Management Within Marginalised Communities," *International Journal on School Disaffection* 9, no. 1 (2012): 51–66; Deanna L. Wilkinson, Chauncey C. Beaty, and Regina M. Lurry, "Youth Violence—Crime or Self-Help? Marginalized Urban Males' Perspectives on the Limited Efficacy of the Criminal Justice System to Stop Youth Violence," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 623 (May 1, 2009): 25–38.

³³ Zatz, "Chicano Youth Gangs and Crime"

³⁴ Wilkinson et al. "Youth Violence—Crime or Self-Help?" 29.

³⁵ Ibid.; Gormally et al. "Somewhere Between Distrust and Dependence"

after they experienced a “traumatic event, either personally or vicariously” in the gang. The rest left because “of important factors external to the gang lifestyle, such as family or employment.” As indicated by Pyrooz et al., there is a wide range of factors influencing a gang member’s decision to disaffiliate. Once these individuals make the decision to leave, however, many struggle to create a new life without the gang.

The Difficult Journey to Tattoo Removal

Many former gang members decide to remove their tattoos because the markings are reminders of their past affiliation and it also prevent a fresh start away from gangs. In his research on tattoo existing removal programs, Bakir Poljac states that even outside of the gang lifestyle, tattoos “intimidate others and provide advertisement for gang membership.”³⁶ These physical reminders of the past make it difficult for people to fully disassociate themselves from the gangs, as their tattoos still mark them as a gang member. In her study on the motivations for tattoo removal, Myrna Armstrong examines this issue. She found that 85% of subjects wanted to remove their tattoos because they had “feelings of dissociation from the past” that prevented them from forming a new identity.³⁷ In addition, 60% of participants reported feeling embarrassed by their tattoos, and almost a third attributed their negative body image to these markings.³⁸ Such findings indicate that tattoos may form a barrier between past gang members and their transition to a new identity in the community.

³⁶ Bakir Poljac and Tod Burke, "Erasing the Past: Tattoo-Removal Programs for Former Gang Members," *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin* 77, no. 8 (2008): 13-18.

³⁷ Myrna L. Armstrong, Dorothy J. Stuppy, Donata C. Gabriel, and Rox Anderson, "Motivation for tattoo removal." *Archives Of Dermatology* 132, no. 4 (1996): 412-416.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 413.

Even though individuals leave the gang, their tattoos still isolate them from the rest of the community. In her analysis of a tattoo removal program in California, Amy Deas reports that gang members with tattoos often feel “ostracized to the point where the identity they are portraying is not their own, but one given to them by society, and it is not until they have their tattoos removed that they can be themselves.”³⁹ Even if an individual has left the gang behind, tattoos act as a trigger for negative reactions and perceptions from the community. Deas identifies the negative consequences of communities isolating already-marginalized people. Former gang members are often ostracized because their tattoos invite unfavorable judgments, such as a presumed history of drugs and violent crime.⁴⁰ As a result, these individuals internalize these judgments and decide to get their tattoos removed in an attempt to address the assumptions of the community.

Since previous affiliated gang members feel that their tattoos are both reminders of the past and barriers between them and the rest of the community, they often try covering or removing their tattoos themselves. In Armstrong’s study of tattoo removal, participants reported many methods to cover their tattoos such as using “makeup, bandages, and jewelry and... clothing.”⁴¹ She describes the daily measures that individuals take to hide their tattoos from their fellow employees, family members, and strangers. While makeup and clothing are less drastic objects of concealment, many individuals are so ashamed of their tattoos they resort to harmful removal methods by developing their “own means of removing their tattoos, such as cutting

³⁹ Amy Deas, “Out of the Darkness and into the Light: Removing Gang Related and Offensive Tattoos: a Mixed Methods Study” (PhD diss., San Jose State University, 2008).1-47

⁴⁰ Ibid. 26

⁴¹ Armstrong et al., “Motivation for tattoo removal,” 412-16.

them out with knives [or] rubbing them off with a belt sander.”⁴² Josh Korman’s study of tattoo removal programs for former gang members described other home removal methods such as “burning them off with a cigarette or pouring acid on them.”⁴³ Research done by Korman and Deas reveal the severe measures that individuals take to remove their own tattoos. Even without tattoo removal programs, some try to remove their tattoos on their own due to feelings of desperation as well as shame in their past.

Previous scholarship indicates that improving an image of employability motivates individuals to remove their tattoos.⁴⁴ Poljac extends this by stating that the “attached stigma” associated with tattoos creates problems in many areas of life, especially when former gang members try to and find work after leaving the gang.⁴⁵ Violence, drugs, and gang banging are all associated with such tattoos, and most employers would not approve of these behaviors in potential employees. For many employers, a tattoo is the first thing they see in a potential employee, making these marking a barrier to an important aspect of their transition outside of the gang. Even if an individual has made many changes to their life after leaving the gang, their tattooed exterior does not reflect this inner transformation.

Life After the Laser

Recently, there have been community efforts to open tattoo removal programs for former gang members, and assist them with their transition out of the gang. However, according to Deas

⁴² Deas, “Out of the Darkness and into the Light.” 4

⁴³ Josh Korman MD, “Removal of Gang-Related Tattoos,” *The Western Journal of Medicine* 162 no. 6 (1995): 1.

⁴⁴ Deas, “Out of the Darkness and into the Light,” 7

⁴⁵ Poljac et al, “Erasing the Past” 17.

there is little research on how lives change after tattoo removal, and there needs to be “a discussion of how people’s lives are actually changed after having their tattoos removed.”⁴⁶ Her study examines the motivations for tattoo removal, in addition to how individuals’ lives change after the process. Her research suggests that tattoo removal is only one of the barriers they face; many struggle with addiction, mental health, and lingering gang affiliation. Deas concludes that tattoo removal is not enough to make these changes. She argues that if tattoo removal programs aim to help people and not simply remove tattoos, they should also offer supporting services, like counseling and case management. Deas recognizes that these community run programs might lack the funding for such services, but they should be “prepared with a list of referrals for program participants who are in need.”

As these studies show, former gang members face serious hardship in their attempt to transition out of their gang. Scholars demonstrate that many have experienced similar adversity ever since their early childhood, and that joining a gang was an attempt to fill the void of kinship that they were unable to find elsewhere. Prior research shows that those who eventually decide to leave their gang may be benefitted by getting their tattoos removed, but there is a dearth of material focused on the lived experiences of these individuals and their motivations for removing their tattoos. Thus, our research seeks to address this gap by looking at the INK-OUT program, a new tattoo removal program in Walla Walla, Washington, and the histories of its participants, as a new case study for this form of gang transitional services.

Methods

⁴⁶ Deas, “Out of the Darkness and into the Light,” 9

The existing scholarly literature provides insightful information for our case study research of INK-OUT, a tattoo removal program located in Walla Walla, Washington. Despite scholars' extensive analysis of the effects of adverse childhoods, motivations to join gangs, juvenile delinquency, and existing tattoo removal programs, questions remained unanswered that require a thorough investigation.

Our main question is, what are the motivations for participation in a tattoo removal program, and how do these programs facilitate the transition away from gangs? This research aims to evaluate and improve the INK-OUT program by illuminating the range of experiences of individuals who are undergoing tattoo removal in order to improve their lives and transition away from gangs. Other questions that guided our research are the following: what circumstances led participants to get their tattoos, and later have them removed by the program? What role does community perception of gangs play in participants' decision to get their tattoos removed, and what effect do community members think the program will have? Since INK-OUT is a community-run program and an initiative recommended by the Community Council, we wanted to explore the relationship between gangs and the rest of Walla Walla. After all, secondary literature indicated that gangs receive considerable stigma from their communities and are often seen as a problem to be eradicated. This finding among others helped form the questions we asked the participants in relation to their experiences and community. Finally, apart from tattoo removal, what kinds of further services are needed in order to facilitate the transition out of a gang? INK-OUT is a new program and has limited resources in what it can accomplish for former gang members, and as such it was important for us to investigate the need for other services since the participants suggested additional programs that will aid their transition.

In order to obtain this data we conducted twenty-three interviews in the fall and winter of 2013. The interviews included thirteen INK-OUT participants, two Walla Walla Police Department detectives, two participant mentors, a Walla Walla High School Intervention Specialist, a Walla Walla Juvenile Justice Center probation officer, a teenager detained at the juvenile detention facility, the doctor who performs the tattoo removal surgeries, and the founder of INK-OUT. In addition to INK-OUT participants, we decided to interview individuals from the community to provide alternate perspectives of what social position gangs hold in Walla Walla.

We made contact with the program participants through their intake interview at INK-OUT meetings, and connected with other individuals through the snowball method. The snowball method is a chain that is formed by recommendations of our existing links. Our original goal was to interview youth because the INK-OUT program's primary focus is on youth with gang-related tattoos. However, not all INK-OUT participants had gang-related tattoos, and many were adults. Because the program is relatively new, we had a limited sample size. Therefore, we had to adjust our target population to include *all* of the applicants who were accepted into the program and volunteered to get interviewed, regardless of their age or the nature of their tattoo. We obtained written consent from each individual, including parental consent for those under eighteen. These protective procedures were necessary in order to establish a trustworthy relationship and a safe space. In order to ensure their safety, pseudonyms were given to all INK-OUT participants in our data analysis. Our interviews were guided by questions that we developed based on recurring themes that appeared in the literature such as family life, the decisions of gang members to get tattoos, their decision to have them removed, and their attitudes towards their future. Each interview lasted approximately one hour, with the shortest

being twenty minutes and the longest three hours. There was also one interview that had to be conducted in Spanish, per the interviewee's request.

After we conducted the interviews we transcribed them verbatim using Express Scribe and then developed a coding system to identify major themes in each transcript. The common themes that emerged from the transcripts formed the basis of our interpretation of the interviews in the next section of this report.

Research Analysis

INK-OUT, a tattoo removal program in Walla Walla, Washington, originated from a recommendation by the Walla Walla community Council. The Community Council is a group of community leaders that focuses on important issues facing Walla Walla; in 2010-2011 the concentration was on gangs. From November 1st through May 25th, the group had twenty-seven weekly meetings and attempted to identify efforts that could reduce gang membership and the rise in gang activity in the region. At the end of their research cycle they produced a list of eleven recommendations: one was the creation of a tattoo removal program for exiting gang members.

Dr. Robert Betz, an obstetrics and gynecology doctor, and Sergio Hernandez, Diversity Committee Chair for the Walla Walla Public Schools, spearheaded the creation of the INK-OUT program. The pair received a generous grant of \$70,000 from the Sherwood Trust and a \$10,000 grant from First Fruits through the Blue Mountain Community Foundation. The grants helped purchase the laser machine and skin chiller device, as well as provide training for the volunteers to operate the machine. INK-OUT does not receive any state funding. INK-OUT operates out of Walla Walla General Hospital where Dr. Betz and his trained staff perform the laser surgeries.

Hernandez created an INK-OUT steering committee that consists of leaders in the Walla Walla community. These include employees of Walla Walla Penitentiary, the Juvenile Justice Center, Walla Walla Public Schools, the Hospital, and the Police Department (see Appendix A). The committee meets monthly to interview the qualifying applicants. When necessary, Hernandez conducts the interviews in Spanish. INK-OUT publicizes their services through advertisements, brochures, radio talk shows, and newspapers articles. The eligibility criteria for someone who is underage is that they must be enrolled in school, employed, or in job training (see Appendix B). They must have a visible tattoo that reflects either their gang affiliation, drug/substance association or “anti-social activity.” INK-OUT offers their services to youth under twenty-one for free and for adults at a reduced cost based on the size of the tattoo (see Appendix C). Young adults are also required to have a mentor or advocate who will provide support and meet with them on a monthly basis. A mentor is not required for adults. INK-OUT requires all participants to do twenty-five hours of community service: ten hours before their treatment begins and the rest before their last treatment. All the participants must be committed to change their lifestyles. The participants primarily reside in the Walla Walla Valley from Dayton to Burbank to Milton-Freewater.

As the program expands, the committee hopes to include additional services to help former individuals transition out of gangs. The INK-OUT committee has a partnership with the hospital to let them use the machine on non-INK-OUT participants. Thirty percent of these proceeds from these tattoo removals go to INK-OUT program: twenty five percent goes into a scholarship fund for higher education and five percent goes towards the maintenance of the machine.

FAMILY AND ACADEMIC HISTORY OF INK-OUT PARTICIPANTS

I. Influence of Family on Early Childhood

We found that in general the participants in INK-OUT come from backgrounds with absent parents, substance abuse, and a lack of academic support, and that these factors may have influenced their decision to join gangs. Most participants stated that they were raised in a single-parent household or in families with absentee parents. The absence of parental figures was often mentioned as a barrier to receiving adequate guidance and support. Often, parents are not present due to employment that removes them from their family. Tony Gonzalez, Felipe Gutierrez, Sebastian Rivera and other participants mentioned that they were not given enough attention from their parents. Gonzalez revealed that, “when we were really young it was hard because [my mom] was working so much. We were always left alone.”⁴⁷ All too often, a parent must work long hours in order to provide essentials for the family, taking them away from their family. However, in the long term, children are neglected and forced to take care of themselves and their siblings, often without any form of guidance. Tony assumed a parental role at a young age, saying, “I always made food for my brothers and changed their diapers.” Due to these long work hours, schedules can prevent parents from bonding with their children. Participants felt that their parents were often unable to monitor the lives of their children; by the time delinquent behavior developed, it was too late to intervene. Therefore, the absence of parents may lead participants to seek role models elsewhere, often in the context of a gang.

II. Family Substance Abuse

⁴⁷Tony Gonzalez, interview by C. Collins, Walla Walla, WA, November 13, 2013. All further references to Gonzales refer to this interview.

Furthermore, many participants grew up in homes where family members would abuse substances, influencing the kids in the house to do the same. We found in our interviews that drug and alcohol addiction made it difficult for certain parents to make their children the first priority. Strikingly, of the thirteen INK-OUT participants we interviewed, eight reported having parents and siblings who battled alcohol addiction.⁴⁸ One interviewee, Daniel Rios, was a child of parents who were not only alcoholics, but who also were involved in marijuana and cocaine trafficking. Rios said that, “there was a lot of drugs on both sides of my family...I [thought it] was normal I mean...that's how they made their money and I didn't think there was anything wrong with it.”⁴⁹ Not only did Rios grow up in an environment where drug dealing was acceptable, but also it did not occur to him to question the legality of his family’s source of income. It was not until Rios began to participate in the business himself that he understood the severe consequences of selling illicit substances. He began to sell drugs to provide money for his family and to support his own addiction to marijuana. Rios’s case demonstrates that in the face of financial instability, people will often go to extreme lengths to provide for their families. Other participants also battled addiction as a result of the influence of their family’s substance abuse. For example, Ellen Gillette began drinking at a young age, stating that, “I started drinking when I was twelve...I guess if you see [family members] doing it, you want to do it.”⁵⁰ Gillette’s statement reveals that the choices her parents made influenced her to also drink. Thus, the effects of addiction at home influences participants to abuse or distribute illicit substances, which no

⁴⁸ These participants are Cesar Armijo, Diane Owens, Gutierrez, Emily Lopez, Daniel Rios and Ellen Gillette.

⁴⁹ Daniel Rios, interview by M. Sanchez-Garcia, Walla Walla, WA, October 11, 2013. All further references to Rios refer to this interview.

⁵⁰ Ellen Gillette, interview by C. Collins, Walla Walla, WA, November 1, 2013. All further references to Gillette refer to this interview.

doubt was only furthered by their later membership in a gang.

In their individual interviews, Theo Wesley and Riley Slater remembered their childhoods filled with alcohol abuse by adults in their home. Each were raised by single mothers who were in abusive relationships with alcoholics. Wesley shared that his mom's boyfriend "would beat my mom and I would try to defend my mom, being like 5 and 6 years old... I [was] being taught too that violence is acceptable from as far back as I can remember."⁵¹ For Wesley, childhood domestic violence was such an everyday occurrence that the violence of his teenage years in the gang may have been almost routine. In addition, similarly to Gonzalez, Wesley undertook a parental role as a protector. His mother was unable to separate herself from this aggressive situation. When Wesley tried to intervene, he also became the recipient of abuse. This ongoing violence caused Wesley to be angry with both his mother and his situation. Even after her mom's separation from her abusive boyfriend, he feared anyone who consumed alcohol. Clearly, the effects of violence were profound and long-lasting. Therefore, domestic abuse can have detrimental effects on youth, and may lead them to run away from home or find security in gangs as shown through the experiences of the INK-OUT participants, Wesley and Slater.

III. Academic Problems

Unfortunately for many INK-OUT participants, their problems followed them from home to school. Many struggled academically because of insufficient resources to succeed there. Jackson White, who is Latino, enjoyed going to school but a language barrier prevented him from excelling. He explained that, "having two different languages [English and Spanish]...It

⁵¹ Theo Wesley, interview by M. Sanchez-Garcia, Walla Walla, WA, November 2, 2013. All further references to Wesley refer to this interview.

was difficult for me to communicate. I isolated myself more than anything. Then it took off on its own from there.”⁵² Without any assistance, White stopped putting in effort and dropped out of school, ultimately making the decision to affiliate with a gang. This shows that schools unequipped with bilingual resources may be more likely to see students to drop out and even become involved in gangs. Similarly, Rios contended that the district failed to assist his needs because of his own background. Rios felt that he “got robbed of [his] education” following his lengthy incarceration for a gang-related crime that took him out of school from 1996-2000. After he was released from prison, he returned to school and quickly fell behind and struggled to focus in the classroom. Rios felt that teachers feared him because of his criminal history, and they believed he was a threat to other students. Because of this, the district forced Rios to constantly change schools, preventing any opportunity for success. His frustration with the uneven instruction, combined with his own personal struggles, caused him to leave school altogether. Despite their attempts to succeed in academics, Rios and White, among other participants, were at a disadvantage to succeed because they did not have the adequate resources and support they needed to excel in school.

Even without a criminal history or difficulties with language immersion, many INK-OUT participants felt that teachers stereotyped them, which in turn affected their education. Prior scholarship demonstrates that the way teachers treat their students play a large role in the way students perceive themselves and school.⁵³ Many participants reported that teachers would make

⁵² Jackson White, interview by C. Collins, Walla Walla, WA, October 24, 2013. All further references to White refer to this interview.

⁵³Katz, Susan Roberta. "Presumed Guilty: How Schools Criminalize Latino Youth." *Social Justice* 24, no. 4 (January 1, 1997): 77-95.

insensitive, often personal attacks, comments in the classroom. Emily Lopez shared that, “the teachers that really care do a good job, but there’s a lot that don’t and those [teachers] say that you are never going to be shit or...you are not going to do anything with your life...and I just think that’s a horrible thing to say to a kid.”⁵⁴ Lopez is not alone in this sentiment. Almost half of the participants reported that these incidents led them to either leave school, join gangs or stop caring about their education. Participants did so because they felt that, with the constant expectation of failure, they were not given an opportunity to demonstrate their potential, as Lopez’s statement dramatically illustrates. Lopez came from a background where she did not have support from her family and tried to find it in school. However, after the incident with her teacher she no longer cared about school, causing her to hang out around with gang members, although she herself was not affiliated. Many other participants expressed that teachers consistently held known gang members to low expectations, and as a result they felt unmotivated to continue with their education. These testimonies reveal that negative interactions between faculty and students can often affect students’ decisions to stay in school, which may be directly tied to their decision to affiliate.

ADOLESCENT EXPERIENCES IN GANGS

VI. Initial Reasons for Joining a Gang

In the face of these traumatic experiences both the home and in school, some young people choose to be in a gang. As shown by previous scholarship, the reasons for joining vary

⁵⁴ Emily Lopez, interview by M. Sanchez-Garcia, Walla Walla, WA, September 30, 2013. All further references to Lopez refer to this interview.

tremendously.⁵⁵ Several participants alluded to this fact, qualifying their responses with the caveat that everyone joins for a different reason.⁵⁶ Prior research suggests that motivations for joining a gang are both instrumental and interpersonal.⁵⁷ An instrumental reason would be joining a gang to have better access to drugs or crime, whereas seeking kinship or a sense of belonging would be interpersonal. Our research shows no reports of the former. This finding contrasts with the belief among local law enforcement that some gang members joined to “be able to make quick money for dealing dope”.⁵⁸ Instead, participants mentioned motivations related to social support, as well as engrained pressures to join gangs.

To begin with, gangs can provide a sense of refuge from community stigma. Several Latino participants said that the community automatically assumes they are in a gang because of their race and clothing, and treat them with suspicion and hostility.⁵⁹ Paradoxically, then, when community members treat young people who are not affiliated as though they *were* involved in gangs, those young people may be more likely to join gangs as a way to seek refuge from the community that has rejected them. For example, INK-OUT participant Theo Wesley expressed, “I think I felt more empowered. ‘Cause I found a group of friends who...don't really judge you. The rest of society would be completely opposite obviously.” In Wesley’s case, his “empowerment” came from finding security in a group that offered him a sense of belonging.

⁵⁵ Lachman et al, “Assessing Youth Motivations,” 212–229; Regan, "The Search for Family" 25-27.

⁵⁶ Cesar Armijo, interview by K. Beers, Walla Walla, WA, October 28, 2013; Felipe Gutierrez, interview by K. Beers, Walla Walla, WA, November 13 2013.

⁵⁷ Lachman et al, “Assessing Youth Motivations,” 213.

⁵⁸ Saul Reyna, interview by K. Beers, Walla Walla, WA, October 10, 2013. All further references to Reyna refer to this interview.

⁵⁹ Wesley, interview; Armijo, interview; Perez, interview;

This sentiment speaks not only to the notoriety gang members receive in the larger community, but also to the comfort they perceive as available should they join a gang.

Just as the gang provides refuge, it also provides protection and social support. White described joining the gang because it was “almost like a shield”, indicating that he joined at least partially for protection from violence. However, even this desire for security was couched in White’s longing to be part of a support system, saying that, being in a gang, “we’re a family because we got each others back. If something happens to you I’m there.” In fact, many participants used the word “support” when describing what they were looking for by joining—the support Cesar Armijo sought in the form of a male role model.⁶⁰ This is confirmed by Pamela Regan’s research on adolescent males in a treatment facility that showed most adolescent males join gangs for companionship and belonging, while few identify peer pressure as influencing their decision to join.⁶¹ For instance, Slater, was unsurprised by his brother’s choice to join a gang, given that they both had found little love and respect in their home.

That was his new family so I'm guessing [he joined] because he wasn't getting enough attention at home...He never had a father figure, a positive role model at all. He picked the gang over his family because they loved him. Treated him with respect, and they were concerned about his welfare...They acted like they were all blood brothers.

Slater’s observations indicate that the gang provides support, a surrogate family, and a sense of belonging to its members. In fact, this social support enabled Armijo to form an identity, saying that joining the gang allowed him to “find out who [he is]”. The formation of an identity is characteristic of the teenage years, and thus Armijo’s response further elucidates the way gang membership often substitutes traditional family ties. These experiences demonstrate the

⁶⁰ Armijo, interview.

⁶¹ Regan, "The Search for Family: Adolescent Males' Motives for Joining Gangs ," 25-27

undeniable camaraderie that youth perceive as available to them should they join a gang.

This desire to join gangs starts much earlier than many people may assume. For example, Lopez spoke of her fear that her young sons will join a gang, knowing they often feel lonely. Because the gang “runs so deep” in parts of her family, she was confident there will always be people who will offer friendship and entice them to join. Regan suggests that the decision to join a gang does not result from coercive peer pressure; rather it is the consequence of prolonged social contact with gang members seen as friends and family, rather than criminals. In fact, while most participants made the decision to join between the ages of thirteen to fifteen, many stated that they started hanging out with gangs even earlier.⁶² Detective Saul Reyna at the Walla Walla Police Department reported that the youngest initiated member in Walla Walla was nine years old.⁶³ This exemplifies how, for many, gangs are an attractive presence even in early childhood.

VII. Tattoo Acquisition and Criminal Behavior

Upon joining a gang, many INK-OUT participants chose to get tattoos signifying their affiliation. In Walla Walla, the two most prominent gangs are 18th Street and Florencia 13. The tattoos vary in shape and size, but most had some reference to their respective gang; often the number “18” or “13”. While non-affiliated participants spoke of getting their tattoo mainly as an act of youthful rebellion, those who got theirs while in the gang articulated a variety of reasons.⁶⁴ When asked why he got his tattoo, Armijo responded, “to let everyone know that I’m a big badass!”, describing how he relished knowing that other people would immediately know his

⁶² Castillo, interview; Slater, interview; Armijo, interview; Lopez, interview; Rios, interview.

⁶³ Reyna, interview

⁶⁴ Diane Owens, interview; Allison Russo, interview by C. Collins, November 22, 2013, Walla Walla, WA.

affiliation. Furthermore, he said that it made him feel “official”, as though it were his final step in joining. According to their mentor, Ramon Ruiz, two participants got their tattoos to “empower their affiliation,” demonstrating a desire to pledge loyalty as an act of commitment.⁶⁵ In all, gang members’ tattoos indicated a desire to display their gang affiliation publicly.

Regardless of gang affiliation, most people we interviewed had prior involvement in some sort of crime. After joining a gang, participants often engaged in criminal behavior, ranging from illegal drugs to destruction of public property and burglary. Though belonging to a gang is not illegal, these associated crimes can lead to prosecution and incarceration. Several participants discussed being “in and out of juvie”, speaking to the cyclical relationship between crime and continued gang participation.⁶⁶ In contrast, INK-OUT participant Diane Owens, age 40, had never been affiliated with a gang, although she did commit crime as a teen in Walla Walla. However, she identified having a support system unique among other participants. As Owens stated, “I was protected by some of the adults who saw past the trouble and the decisions I was making and was [sic] trying to help the underlying problem.”⁶⁷ Of course, as a white, non-affiliated teenager, she likely would have had access to a support network other participants did not. Owens’ story inadvertently illuminates the opportunities probably afforded her because of her race and social standing. Altogether, most participants had a history of criminal behavior, though the consequences varied depending on whether they had been affiliated with a gang.

⁶⁵ Ramon Ruiz, interview by K. Beers, October 24, 2013, Walla Walla, WA. All further references to Ruiz refer to this interview.

⁶⁶ White, interview.

⁶⁷ Owens, interview.

VIII. Non-Affiliated Attitudes Towards Gang Members

These patterns of criminal behavior have a strong impact on how the general public regards gang members.⁶⁸ Owens, reflecting upon the youth who enter the store she manages, said, “These kids bring me a bad energy. They have no guidance. I’m thinking, what if they decide to shoot?” This judgment is due in large part to the visibility of gang tattoos, which label gang members as an immediate threat. In fact, for many community members tattoos are not only linked inextricably with gangs, but also suggest a more general moral depravity. For example, Owens used language tinged with religious judgment to identify the gang tattoos she sees as “satanic” and “marks of the beast.” She concluded, “there’s nothing going on in there. There’s no holy spirit showing. They’re very dark people. Dangerous.” While not explicitly mentioning race, a word like “dark” invokes racially charged attitudes that further the division between Latinos and whites in Walla Walla. Marjorie Zatz similarly showed in her research that communities experience a “moral panic” in response to a perceived rise in Chicano gang activity.⁶⁹ This fear of gangs resulted in resentment and distrust towards Latinos in the area. While Owens’ attitudes may not be representative of the entire community, her response does demonstrate this distress towards the presence of gangs in Walla Walla.

It is attitudes such as these, Armijo said, that lead to gang youth feeling isolated by the community, eventually believing they are indeed as irredeemable as the public depicts them. He lamented that some of his former gang-mates have tremendous potential, but they have been told by the community, “[they are] gonna be a gang member, [they are] gonna work in the fields all

⁶⁸ Thomas J. Bernard and Megan C. Kurlychek, *The Cycle of Juvenile Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010)

⁶⁹Zatz, "Chicano youth gangs and crime." 129-158.

their life.” Evidently, many people in the community make no distinction between productive farm laborers and gang members, drawing upon all-too-common stereotypes of Latinos as inherently criminal while neglecting their economic contributions to society. Amidst attitudes like these, many stay in the gang, feeling that they have no better option. Unsurprisingly, participants almost universally identified tattoos as a particular source of prejudice directed towards them. Armijo expressed frustration at the ease by which his tattoos identified him as a target for harassment by police. According to him, most people in Walla Walla assume that all gang members are Mexican, and see tattoos, shaved heads and baggy clothes as inherent to gang life, even though “that’s all stereotype because lots of people do those kinds of things without being involved in gangs”. Even those who are not in gangs face similar discrimination. Despite being unaffiliated and untattooed, Jeffrey Perez states, “most people assume that [he] bang[s]”⁷⁰, because he is Latino, and his family is in a gang. This results in increased attention from police and mistrust from the community. This kind of animosity affects other Latino youth outside of gangs, and has dramatic effects on the prejudice directed towards Latinos in Walla Walla.

More generally, participants spoke of feeling frustrated by common stereotypes about gangs in Walla Walla. One such myth is that gang members are indiscriminately violent, which Felipe Gutierrez, a young INK-OUT participant, refuted, maintaining that typically gang violence only affects other gang members.⁷¹ This claim is supported by research showing intra-

⁷⁰ Jeffrey Perez, interview by K. Beers, Walla Walla, WA, November 23, 2013. All further references to Perez refer to this interview.

⁷¹ Felipe Gutierrez, interview by K. Beers, Walla Walla, WA, November 13 2013. All further references to Gutierrez refer to this interview.

gang violence is more common than violence directed toward the community.⁷² Despite this, Detective Reyna affirmed that the community does indeed fear gang violence, saying, “It affects the whole community. People are scared when they see ‘drive-by shooting’, ‘man gets stabbed in Walla Walla’ in the UB.”⁷³ His office gets many complaints from people downtown who fear the sight of gang youth in public spaces, echoing the notion of a “moral panic” arising from gang activity. Based on our interviews, we are not able to determine whether the Gang Unit detectives see a fear of gang violence as legitimate, or whether they are attempting to quell a possibly unnecessary “moral panic.”

IX. Gang Unit Interactions With Gang Youth

In recent years policing and enforcement of gangs has expanded, though it is unclear whether this came at the behest of community pressure or the department’s own judgment. Detectives Reyna and his partner Kevin Bane did note an increase in gang activity in recent years. When confronting this escalation, both detectives repeatedly emphasized their belief in the importance of building relationships with gang members in order to effectively minimize gang activity. To do this, they perform home visits, converse with known gang members, and “keep tabs” on their whereabouts and activity. In part, they say, this diplomacy aims to develop trust so that their tactics are not seen as exclusively punitive. Reyna emphasized his own Hispanic identity in affirming his commitment to avoid racial profiling, but admitted that unfortunately many gang members do perceive their methods as racially biased.

⁷² James Short, "Gangs and Adolescent Violence," *Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence Institute of Behavioral Science University of Colorado, Boulder* (1996).

⁷³ Reyna, interview.

Gang members were well aware of the tactics articulated by Detectives Reyna and Bane, but did not see them as either fair or effective. Several participants expressed distrust of the police, as well as a general resentment towards what they see as harassment of their friends and community.⁷⁴ This is consistent with prior research that shows police profiling of gang members leads to feelings of harassment or being targeted because of their physical appearance or association.⁷⁵ For instance, Gutierrez mentioned that the police would do a slow drive-by of his house at least three times a day when he and his brother were involved in a gang, which he considered intimidation. Likewise, Slater recalled growing up with the police constantly stopping him, which he attributed to his tattoos marking him as a gang member to officers.

Perez, though not affiliated, described countless instances of police cars slowly following him at a distance because they assumed he was going to commit a crime. His most traumatic experience was a time when police cars had surrounded him and a group of other Latino friends as they walked to Taco Bell after playing a game of basketball.

It was all dirt right there, and cops surround us and pull out their machine guns, their tasers, their pistols and yell 'get on the ground!' I couldn't even count how many squad cars and supervisors there were, there were just so many...I can understand them sending one, two, three police to go check out the situation, because right at the view they could tell we weren't doing nothing. You think they could just stop and ask, not "get on the ground all of you!"

Perez emphasized that this police harassment was a recurring experience, and that it caused him great distress in feeling as if he could not walk across town without being targeted. While not commenting on harassment, Armijo expressed general dissatisfaction, saying, "they haven't

⁷⁴ Castillo, interview; Armijo, interview; Perez, interview; Wesley, interview; Slater, interview.

⁷⁵ R. K. Jackson and W.D. McBride, *Understanding Street Gangs*, Incline Village, NV: Copperhouse, 1996; A. Valdez, *Gangs: A Guide to Understanding Street Gangs*, San Clemente, CA: Law Tech, 2000.

really served and protected me. No point in calling the police because it's always going to be the same thing." Despite this animosity, most participants did say they would welcome increased police presence as long as it was more equitable, which previous scholarship also affirms.⁷⁶

X. Backstabbing and Gunfire: Motivations for Leaving the Gang

Apart from the social alienation that accompanies racial profiling, many interviewees explained that internal problems caused them to leave the gang. When speaking about this decision, INK-OUT participants' responses fell into three distinct categories. The first reason was a perception of safety that leaving the gang could bring. INK-OUT participant White recalled the danger he faced in a gang: times when he was surrounded by people getting stabbed around him, getting chased and shot at during the middle of the night, or getting jumped by rival gangs. Similarly, Gutierrez eagerly anticipated not being the target of rival gangs or constantly having to prove himself by "putting in work", committing dangerous crimes for the gang.

Other participants told us their fellow gang members had betrayed them on multiple occasions and brought unwanted drama to their lives, even though they had considered their comrades to be family. Wesley said,

I learned that none of these friends are your friends. You're sitting in a jail cell and people won't come visit you, they won't put money on your books for a commissary, they won't write you letters. Those are all things that your friends would do and when you go to jail none of the so-called friends that are homies, none of those guys are gonna write you those letters, they are not going to accept your collect phone calls. They're only your friend if you are standing there.

⁷⁶ Deanna Wilkinson, Chauncey Beaty, and Regina Lurry, "Youth Violence—Crime or Self-Help? Marginalized Urban Males' Perspectives on the Limited Efficacy of the Criminal Justice System to Stop Youth Violence," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. (2009): 25-38; Sinead Gormally and Ross Deuchar, "Somewhere between Distrust and Dependence: Young People, the Police and Anti-Social Behaviour Management within Marginalised Communities," *International Journal on School Disaffection*. no. 1 (2012): 51-66.

Wesley perception of disloyalty revealed to him that being in the gang was ultimately not worth the danger he faced for being affiliated. Lopez felt equally betrayed and disillusioned after another gang member committed an act of violence against her family.

Finally, a sense of responsibility to family caused some to choose to stop associating with their gang. Daniel Rios identified the birth of his daughter as the moment that caused his departure from his gang. His choice indicated that he did not want his child to follow in his footsteps by being around gangs. Similarly, Perez guessed that the only reason he had not joined a gang was that his older brothers had discouraged him from a young age. While Perez's brothers chose not to disassociate themselves because they were "in it too deep", they demonstrate a growing aversion to the gang lifestyle by keeping their youngest brother from joining. Clearly, a marked discrepancy exists between the expectations of kinship that led them to join the gang and the subsequent experiences that caused their eventual exit.

THE TRANSITION TOWARDS TATTOO REMOVAL

XI. Initial Contact With INK-OUT

However, once gang members made the difficult decision to leave, they were still left with the physical remnants of their time in the gang. Without a program like INK-OUT, individuals desperately tried to remove their tattoos themselves, or at least cover them with Band-Aids, makeup or clothing. This is consistent with our secondary literature that shows many use alternative home-methods to remove their tattoos. One participant, Emily Lopez, revealed that she constantly hid her gang-related tattoos from her fellow employees and her employer by

wearing extra outer garments.⁷⁷ Her employer believed it would not send a good message about the rest of the company. In fact, research shows that 47% of tattoo removal participants use clothing to hide their tattoos.⁷⁸ However, the constant concealment of tattoos only offers a temporary solution, and consequently some participants may try to remove their tattoos themselves. Allison Russo felt so disgusted by her tattoo she tried to carve over it, and scratch it off. She continued, “I have put bleach on it. I have done everything to get it off myself out of desperation.”⁷⁹ Russo is not alone; prior research shows that people often take extreme measures to remove their tattoos, including rubbing them off with a belt sander, or burning them away with cigarettes or acid.⁸⁰ People like Russo mutilate themselves because they feel the community negatively judges their tattoos.

After trying to remove their tattoos themselves, individuals were relieved to learn about the INK-OUT program. Besides brochures and advertisements, the program mostly spread by word of mouth through friends or family members, many of whom were participants themselves. For example, there is one married couple and multiple pairs of siblings. Ellen Gillette has been so happy with the early stages of INK-OUT that she recommends the program to all her friends and family who have tattoos they wish to remove. Clearly, participants trust the program, as they are willing to advertise it to others.

In addition to positive recommendations from friends and family, participants revealed

⁷⁷ Lopez, interview.

⁷⁸ Armstrong et al., “Motivation for tattoo removal,” 412-16.

⁷⁹ Russo, interview.

⁸⁰ Deas, “Out of the Darkness and into the Light,” 9; Korman, “Removal of Gang-Related Tattoos,” 1.

that INK-OUT's affordability attracted them to the program. Participants repeatedly noted that expensive tattoo removal programs have never been an option and they are incredibly grateful for INK-OUT's low cost. Gillette explains that, "Without it there is no way I could afford [tattoo removal] on my own." It is worth noting that Gillette is a single mom of six children and currently unemployed. Similar to Gillette, Owens explained that she waited over twenty years to find a tattoo removal program like INK-OUT. She even looked at a program in Yakima, but it was too expensive. Participants under the age of eighteen were especially relieved to not have to pay, given the limited funds available to them without a full-time job. The lack of affordable tattoo removal programs in the Pacific Northwest distinguishes INK-OUT as unique and necessary because it caters to a population that would otherwise not be served.

XII. Perspectives on the Future: Tattoo Removal "Changes People's Lives"

After deciding to remove their tattoos, many participants look forward to the benefits that INK-OUT will provide them, such as a role model for guidance and a hopeful future. The INK-OUT participants responded positively to the guidance of their mentor. As the participants transition out of the gang, they lose their friend group and the mentor can fill this loss of a support network. Tony Gonzalez recognized that his mentor, Ramon Ruiz, has opened many opportunities for him, such as helping him get his driver's license and a job at a fast-food restaurant. Gonzalez appreciated Ruiz's efforts to give him alternate ways to spend his time, like a job, now that he does not associate with the gang. As an adult Latino male, Ruiz represents a role model for Gonzalez who is not associated with a gang. Similar to Gonzalez, Armijo cites his own mentor as a positive influence in his life. His mentor was the one to inspire him to get

his tattoo removed and was “always there to encourage me.” Armijo’s mentor is a positive presence in his life by being a support system when Armijo has problems or concerns with leaving the gang. Detective Bane acknowledged that being in a gang involves having a mentor, so it is important for INK-OUT to provide a substitute mentor for the participants. He explained that when an individual joins a gang, they are matched with an older gang member who teaches his mentee how to handle drugs and guns, and how to steal cars. The INK-OUT mentor replaces a missing void created by the departure of the gang, while eliminating the negative influence which encouraged crime. It was this void that, for many, lead them to gangs in the first place.

In addition to the mentor component, INK-OUT also requires twenty-five hours of community service. We heard a range of responses to this requirement. The participants either plan to or currently volunteer at a wide variety of locations: Allison Lopez wants to work with at risk kids, Daniel Rios would like to volunteer at a reservoir, and Sebastian Rivera coaches his son’s sports teams. Rivera commended the volunteer component, citing that it “exposes yourself to other people who have problems that you don't have” which makes him appreciate his own good fortune, however limited it may be. Most of the participants look forward to giving back to those in their community. However, some participants believed the requirement was an added stressor in their lives. For example, Riley Slater has been volunteering at a shelter in and a senior center, but actually finding these locations proved difficult. He states, “I found that volunteering is about as hard as looking for a job because a lot of places want a month or a year commitment...I had to go to school, I had to go to work.” Slater reveals that it can be stressful to find a volunteer site that fits into one’s already busy life. Another participant, Theo Wesley, agreed with Slater’s sentiments on the difficult process of incorporating volunteering into his

other commitments. Wesley states, “I have a life and a schedule that is absolutely so busy that the idea of doing twenty-five hours of community service and fitting it into my schedule is actually a challenge.” Altogether some participants were eager to volunteer in their community, others were apprehensive of the time commitment that it would require amidst an already stressful life.

In all, participants expressed excitement and hope about their tattoo removal. As Ellen said, “I think it changes peoples’ lives...I think it will change my life for the better.” Gillette claimed her tattoo removal is just one part of her journey towards a positive future. She is looking for employment, has moved into a new apartment, and recently gained custody of two of her six children. Sebastian Rivera believed that his tattoo removal will present a positive image to future employers and Gillette hoped that her tattoo removal will allow her physical appearance to reflect her progress of quitting drugs and living in an apartment, not a homeless shelter. This positive progress is all geared towards her ultimate goal: to be reunited with her kids from social services.⁸¹ Lopez and Gonzales look forward to not being self conscious about their tattoos overshadowing their job performance. Owens said that her tattoo removal will be “like taking a bath, getting these removed.” This “bath” allows the participants to be a new person, free from the tattoos that constantly remind them of their past, providing a clean start.

XIII. Limitations of INK-OUT

While participants are hopeful about their futures, many revealed that tattoo removal is only one part of the complicated transition out of gang life. Many of the participants have been involved in gangs since they were children and have not had consistent employment. Wesley

⁸¹ Sebastian Rivera, interview by M. Sanchez-Garcia, Walla Walla, WA, November 5, 2013.

suggested that job training for former gang members like himself that would give him the skills he needs to gain consistent employment. He acknowledged that the skills he learned in the gang would not help when he wants to get a real job.

“I definitely think a job program or a school program [is important]...you have to have constructive things going on in your life... otherwise you are gonna be sitting in your house with nothing to do. So what are you gonna do? You are gonna go back and do what you have always done.”

Welsey articulates that a job will help form his identity free of gangs or other kind of criminal behavior. Tattoo removal addresses his physical reminders of the gang, but not his fear of eventually going back to the gang if he does not have something else to fill the void.

In addition to a jobs program, some of the participants stressed the importance of counseling because the transition out of gangs and into the community can be difficult emotionally. Participants felt that the gang was like another family, but when they left they lost an entire support group. They felt isolated and struggled to find friends outside of the gang. Daniel Rios acknowledged that his childhood and his former gang lifestyle still emotionally affects him. He gets anxiety attacks every day so he takes medication for residual trauma from his time in the gang. Rios goes to a counselor outside of town and expressed the positive impact counseling has had on his life. His counselor helps him to cope with his past, which has helped him get to the point he is today, ready to remove his tattoos. Gillette already has a counselor outside of the INK-OUT program, covered by her insurance. She advocated for a counseling component for INK-OUT, saying, “ I am lucky that I have insurance to cover it. But I think it could be good for people that don’t have it also. I think it’s a good idea.” Gillette acknowledged that a private counselor could be expensive for some of the other participants since most of them

are either unemployed or in minimum wage jobs, but her experience clearly demonstrates the need for counseling services.

While many participants expressed excitement about tattoo removal, some individuals had to leave Walla Walla altogether because even though they were disaffiliated from the gang and in the INK-OUT program, their ties to their gang were too strong to let them complete their transition into the community. Jackson White and Jackie Meredith are a married couple who helped start a gang in Walla Walla in the early 90s. They decided to leave Walla Walla to start a new life in another state after failing to create new identities separate from their gang. White explains his decision to leave,

“Everyone knew me. All the gang members knew me since it’s such a small town. Everyone knows where I’m at... It was my decision to take off. It was one of the best decisions I made because doors were opened for me.”

It was painful for the couple to leave their family and whole life behind, but they were forced to realize that there were no opportunities socially or in the job market in Walla Walla. Their identities as gang members remained even after they left the gang life. Currently, the couple comes back to Walla Walla once a month to finish their removal treatments. Meredith’s family is still heavily involved in gangs and she admits that her son would have probably gotten involved had they not moved away. Even though White and Meredith are in the tattoo removal process, they still do not feel that they can permanently return to Walla Walla because their identity with the gangs is still strong after these years.

Just as Meredith and White decided to move away, Samuel Mendez, a participant who we intended to interview, was forced to leave Walla Walla because it became too dangerous for him. Previously he was involved in a gang, but he was ready to leave his former life behind by getting

his tattoos removed. Immediately after his acceptance to the INK-OUT program, he was a victim of a drive-by shooting at his house. Mendez realized that his history made it too dangerous for him to live in Walla Walla and consequently felt he had to leave. Clearly, tattoo removal does not address every aspect, like violence, of leaving the gang. For Mendez, tattoo removal was not going to be enough to transition into his new life.

XIV. Conclusions

In general, we learned that INK-OUT participants grew up with an absence of positive family role models and facing issues of substance and physical abuse. Unfortunately, while school can sometimes act as a mediator of these negative forces, offering a bridge out of poverty, participants' negative experiences in school demonstrate yet another safety net unavailable to them. These experiences illustrate that youth join gangs to obtain support, kinship, and belonging. Upon joining, participants received gang-related tattoos signifying their allegiance and also engaged in crime. Visible and violent crime increases community stigma, which in turn increases police enforcement. Participants often perceive such enforcement as unwarranted harassment, leading them to distrust the law. These forms of social alienation can prompt participants to exit their gangs. However, some interviewees also mention other deciding factors in their decision, such as an act of betrayal within the gang. Our research shows that a tattoo removal program like INK-OUT has the potential to remove visible markings of former affiliation, and thereby enable opportunities for employment and avoid certain forms of stigma. While a meaningful step, tattoo removal alone cannot address all the facets of social reintegration after gang membership, such as the residual psychological trauma from one's time

in a gang or the need to relocate entirely.

Conclusion and Action Recommendations:

The data from our interviews clearly illustrates the difficulties facing those seeking to remove their tattoos through INK-OUT: early exposure to violence and substance abuse, exclusion from school, alienation from their communities and stigma surrounding their former affiliation. We found that the program is a beneficial service for these individuals who have faced these challenges and are trying to find a way forward. Interviewees testified to the transformative potential of a service that could eliminate barriers to gainful employment and social acceptance. As such, INK-OUT should continue to receive support from the local community, at increasing levels. However, tattoo removal does not attend to every aspect of the transition away from gangs; thus, action is still required at the state and community level. Our recommendations seek to address additional ways to assist those leaving a gang, as well as confronting the underlying causes of membership.

Locally, many agencies and institutions have the ability to take meaningful action to support gang youth and those who have left their gang. As evidenced in participants' testimonies, many gang youth experience discrimination and suffer from low expectations in school, often due to their known gang affiliation. It is imperative that administrators and teachers avoid, whenever possible, a strictly punitive approach to gang activity in schools, given that such actions further alienate and discourage their students. Considering recent efforts towards developing cultural competency in the district, these trainings should emphasize the multiple layers of marginalization gang members face, given that our interviewees revealed many are

Latino, poor and have spent time in juvenile detention.⁸² After all, their success in school depends on the support of staff. Furthermore, we believe that administrators should make a concerted effort to hire more Latino teachers at Walla Walla High School. Currently, even though nearly a third of the student body identifies as Hispanic, there are only two Latino teachers.⁸³ The reported success of the mentor relationship within INK-OUT demonstrates the importance of role models, particularly male ones. As such, it is crucial that young gang members see Latino men in positions of leadership, acting as a positive role models.

Building upon the success of the tattoo removal component, INK-OUT is well positioned to expand its services to include programs like counseling, support groups and job training. Many participants expressed a desire for counseling as a way to cope with traumatic experiences in their past. A unique opportunity exists because of RCW 82.14.460, which allows “sales and use tax for chemical dependency or mental health treatment services.” Locally, Walla Walla county assigns “1/10th of 1%” of the sales tax towards these services. We strongly recommend that the Walla Walla County Health Department and the County Commissioner allocate funding to INK-OUT for mental health counseling, given that our research demonstrates former gang members experience pervasive trauma and difficulties integrating. Participant support groups could be helpful for those who are not interested in individual sessions with a therapist. In addition, nearly all participants emphasized that their most pressing need was to find a job, a service that INK-OUT could help provide. Job training could include: resume help, interview

⁸² Simerun Singh, Andrew Ryan and Catherine DeCramer , “Quality Education For All: Cultural Competency in K – 12 Education ”(State of the State Report, Whitman College, 2012), <http://walatinos.net/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/CulturalCompetency2012.pdf>

⁸³ “Walla Walla High School in Walla Walla East, Washington (WA),” last modified 2012, accessed February 27, 2014, <http://www.city-data.com/school/walla-walla-high-school-wa.html>

tips, and a directory of businesses in Walla Walla that have expressed their willingness to hire INK-OUT participants. This would address Theo Wesley's belief that a job will help him not fall back into the gang. Of course, because these suggestions are coming directly from INK-OUT participants, it would be prudent to include former participants in the decision-making process of the program by including one or more of them on the INK-OUT committee and encouraging active and continuous involvement by "alumni" in the expansion of the program.

Finally, community leaders in Walla Walla who take an active role in confronting gang activity should avoid framing the issue in terms of a "gang problem," as it is often called. Given that our research shows many were able to find a sense of belonging in gangs where they could not otherwise, this framing not only obfuscates the community's role in sometimes exacerbating the drive towards gangs, but also posits gangs as an entity to be eradicated. Instead, concerned parties should attend to the possibility that the violent, criminal nature of gangs could be eliminated without requiring the complete elimination of the gang itself. In other words, there could be hope for the positive aspects of gangs, such as the feeling of camaraderie, to remain without the criminal component. After all, we only spoke with individuals who had chosen to leave the gang. Accordingly, our findings show the negative aspects of gangs that led to members' exit, but do not represent the views of those who remain affiliated because they still feel positively about the gang's role in their life. Furthermore, the Walla Walla Police Department should reconsider zero-tolerance procedures which result in what participants called "harassment". We found little evidence that such tactics did indeed deter gang activity. On the contrary, they instead seemed to heighten gang resistance to authority and breed feelings of social alienation. Specifically, those who wish to positively impact at-risk youth could partner

with INK-OUT to identify their business or organization as one that welcomes applications from INK-OUT participants, thereby addressing the need for both employment and community action.

At the state level, the Washington legislature has the power to enact policies that would address the factors that lead to kids joining gangs, as well as funding programs that assist those trying to exit. In recent years, two bills were proposed which would have permitted civil injunctions against gang members, even without proof of criminal activity.⁸⁴ Following an injunction, a young gang member could be banned from being in an area, and receive a criminal conviction for violating the ban. Instead of these punitive measures, the state should actively fund after-school extracurricular and mentoring programs. Efforts such as these may substitute the forms of social support that many participants sought by joining a gang. Especially given Washington State's paramount responsibility to fund education, as affirmed by the state Supreme Court in *McCleary V. State of Washington*, public schools can act as a hub for many of these services. This increased school funding can aid efforts to make school a welcoming environment for *all* students, including gang members.

In addition to local initiatives, we believe that systemic change is needed to address the factors which cause certain youth to join gangs rather than others. For example, raising the state minimum wage, or expanding community health centers for low-income families, could reduce the financial strain that causes parents to work multiple jobs. After all, according to our interviews, an inconsistent family presence often contributed to participants joining gangs.

Because INK-OUT has only been in operation for a short time, we were not able to interview any participant who had spent significant time without their tattoo. As such, we aimed

⁸⁴ H.B. 2594, 62nd Legislature. (2012); H.B. 2216, 62nd Legislature. (2012)

to ascertain the participants' initial experiences and expectations for their future, instead of evaluating the long-term effectiveness of the procedure. Future research should interview gang members several years after they have removed their tattoos in order to understand the lasting impacts of a program like INK-OUT.

Appendix A: INK-OUT Committee Member

INK-OUT Steering Committee

Current Committee Members

- Holly Howard The Health Center
- Katherine Boehm The Health Center
- Ramon Ruiz Walla Walla Penitentiary
- Helen Davis Walla Walla Penitentiary
- Jim Sporleder Walla Walla Public Schools
- Federico Diaz Walla Walla Public Schools
- Mireya Vargas Walla Walla Public Schools
- Sergio Hernandez Walla Walla Public Schools
- Dr. Bob Betz WWGH
- John Cress WWGH
- Brian Anderson WWGH
- John Radzikowski Christian Aid Center
- Scott Bieber WW Police Department
- Manny Reyna Juvenile Justice Center
- Tessa Matson The Health Center
- Jenna Fritz The Health Center
- Kathy Rogers WW County Health Dept

Past Committee Members

- Lawson Knight Blue Mt Community Foundation
- Kristi Spurgeon-Johnson WWGH
- Alvaro Nuzez Visual Uprising
- Kimberly Lewis Community Member
- Mike Bates Juvenile Justice Center
- Leahna Laboca WWGH
- Denise Hickerson WWGH
- Liz McDevitt Helpline
- Glenna Awbrey The Star Project

Appendix B: Eligibility

Ink-Out

Tattoo Removal Project

Eligibility Criteria

13 -21 year old

- Be at-risk youth or adult – with a tattoo that is gang affiliated, drug associated and/or anti-social – past or present
- Primary attention given to visible tattoos (arm, legs, neck, face etc)
- Enrolled in school / job training / employed
- Perform 25 hours of volunteer service with 10 hours completed before treatment starts and 10 hours before second visit.
Additional five hours before last treatment
- Have a mentor / advocate --- this person will be invited to the Ink-Out Screening Committee meeting and/or to the first treatment. Mentor / advocate will be asked to meet with individual at least once month.
- Be committed to life style change

Over 21

- Pays a fee – based on size of tattoo and other criteria
- Perform 25 hours of volunteer service
- Other requirements – as listed above, except for required mentor / advocate, which is optional.

Appendix C: INK-OUT Prices

Ink Out

(Adult Price Sheet)

<u>Treatment Area</u>	<u># Units</u>	<u>Price per session</u>
Initial Physician evaluation and treatment plan	N/A	\$ 35.00
≤7 sq inches	1	\$ 25.00
> 7 ≤ 14 sq inches	2	\$ 40.00
> 14 ≤ 21 sq inches	3	\$ 55.00
> 21 ≤ 28 sq inches	4	\$ 70.00
> 28 ≤ 35 sq inches	5	\$ 85.00
> 35 ≤ 42 sq inches	6	\$ 100.00
> 42 ≤ 49 sq inches	7	\$ 110.00
> 49 ≤ 56 sq inches	8	\$ 120.00
> 56 ≤ 63 sq inches	9	\$ 130.00
> 70 ≤ 77 sq inches	10	\$ 140.00
> 77 ≤ 84 sq inches	11	\$ 150.00

Appendix D: Interviews

Participants: *(All INK-OUT participants were given pseudonyms)*

Armijo, Cesar. Interview by K. Beers, Walla Walla, WA, October 28, 2013.
 Gillette, Ellen. Interview by C. Collins, Walla Walla, WA, November 1, 2013.
 Gonzalez, Tony. Interview by C. Collins, Walla Walla, WA, November 13, 2013.
 Gutierrez, Felipe. Interview by K. Beers,, Walla Walla, WA, November 13 2013.
 Lopez, Emily. Interview by M. Sanchez-Garcia, Walla Walla, WA, September 30, 2013.
 Owens, Diane. Interview by K. Beers, Walla Walla, WA, October 4, 2013.
 Rios, Daniel. Interview by M. Sanchez-Garcia, Walla Walla, WA, October 11, 2013.
 Rivera, Sebastian. Interview by M. Sanchez-Garcia, Walla Walla, WA, November 5, 2013.
 Russo, Allison. Interview by C. Collins, Walla Walla, WA, November 22, 2013.
 Slater, Riley. Interview by M. Sanchez-Garcia, Walla Walla, WA, October 20, 2013.
 Wesley, Theo. Interview by M. Sanchez-Garcia, Walla Walla, WA, November 2, 2013.
 White, Jackson. Interview by C. Collins, Walla Walla, WA, October 24, 2013.

Others:

Bane, Kevin. Walla Walla Police Department Gang Unit, interview by C. Collins, Walla Walla, WA, October 10, 2013
 Betz, Robert. Doctor at Walla Walla General Hospital, interview by C. Collins, Walla Walla, WA, November 20, 2013.
 Hernandez, Sergio. Diversity Committee Chair, interview by C. Collins, K. Beers, M. Sanchez-Garcia, Walla Walla, WA, December 10, 2013.
 Mendoza, Carolina. Mentor, interview by M. Sanchez-Garcia, Walla Walla, WA, November 7, 2013.
 Norsworthy, Vance. Walla Walla Juvenile Justice Center Probation Officer, interview by K. Beers, October 23, 2013.
 Perez, Jeffrey. High school student, interview by K. Beers, Walla Walla, WA, November 20, 2013.
 Saul, Reyna. Walla Walla Police Department Gang Unit, interview by K. Beers, Walla Walla, WA, October 10, 2013.
 Ruiz, Ramon. Walla Walla Penitentiary, INK-OUT mentor, interview by K. Beers, Walla Walla, WA, October 24, 2013.
 Vargas, Mireya. Walla Walla High School Intervention Specialist, interview by M. Sanchez-Garcia, Walla Walla, WA, October 23, 2013.

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