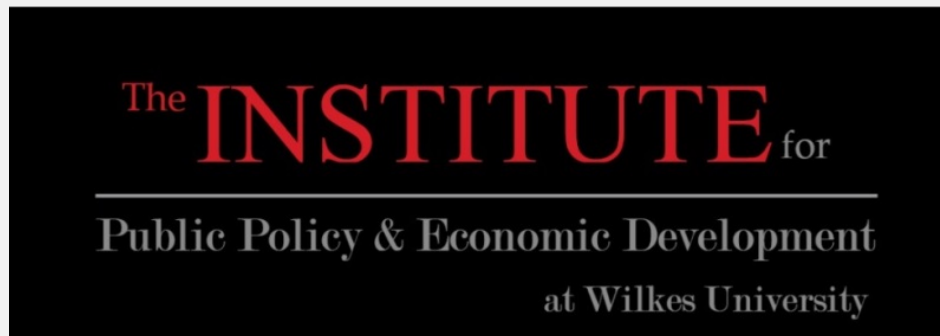


2015



*A partnership among Keystone College, King's College, Luzerne County Community College, Marywood University, Misericordia University, Penn State Wilkes-Barre, The Commonwealth Medical College, University of Scranton & Wilkes University*

# **PUBLIC SAFETY TASK FORCE CASE STUDY: OPERATION GANGUP TO SHINE**

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**The Institute for Public Policy & Economic Development (The Institute)** is a partnership of nine colleges and universities in the Scranton/ Wilkes-Barre/ Hazleton Metropolitan Statistical Area. The Institute's managing partner is Wilkes University.

The Institute works on proprietary research studies for public, non-profit, and private companies in several states. The Institute provides data, analysis, strategy, and implementation recommendations to provide solutions to clients. The Institute services include:

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### **The Institute's Public Safety Task Force Committees**

Education  
Community  
Law Enforcement  
Legislative

## **Public Safety Task Force**

The Public Safety Task Force was developed by The Institute for Public Policy and Economic Development in order to guide research efforts aimed at improving the region's quality of life by addressing issues related to crime and public safety.

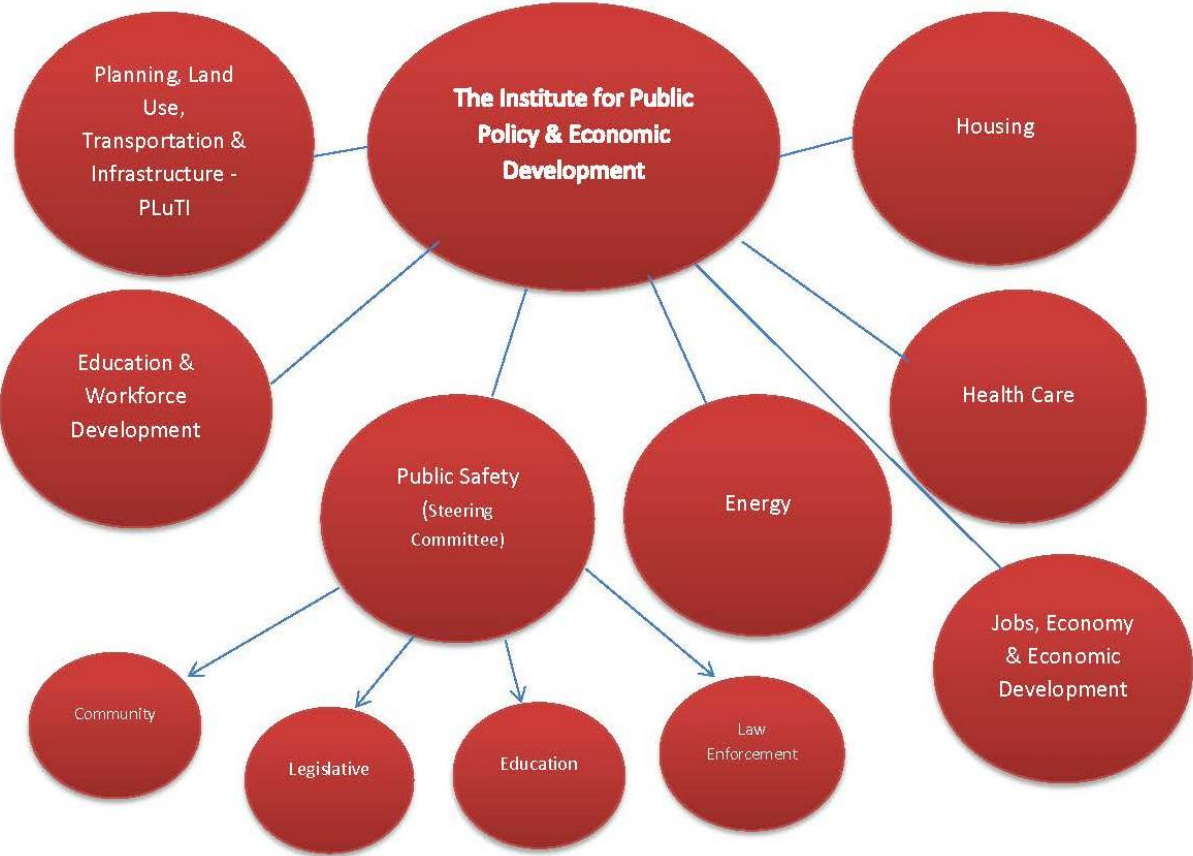
After the initial Indicators reports, it was evident that crime was becoming a major concern in the region. The region's crime statistics have been comparable to other geographic areas – Northeastern Pennsylvania is a safe place to live. However, certain types of offenses have seen increases over the years: particularly drug abuse offenses and property crimes. It is apparent, however, that our communities' resources are stretched thin and their capacity to provide adequate public safety has been challenged. Many communities resorted to part time policing and larger cities were also crippled with costs.

In April 2010, The Institute and Pennsylvania Economy League released a joint study entitled *Regional Policing: The Case for Increased Service Levels and Accountability*. The purpose of this study was to analyze regional policing versus individual community policing from both a cost perspective and the value of the presence of full time dedicated police officers. Given the decline in full time officers, communities and residents are at a higher risk and with limited resources, training, and investigative ability, crime resolution is not at a high level. This study promoted strategic regionalization of police forces to enhance coverage across all communities in Luzerne County. As of 2014, the study is still quoted in local newspaper editorials as evidence to move aggressively forward to form regional police forces within the county. Efforts by community leaders to encourage the dialogue and planning for regionalization are beginning to produce results. The Northeast Luzerne County Regional Police Initiative has had a number of successful planning meetings to date.

Shortly thereafter, The Institute was approached by State Senator John Yudichak regarding gang activity in region. Based on federal reports, it was evident that the drug trade encouraged national gangs to relocate and new local gangs to form. Many crimes in the region can be linked to drugs and gangs. As a result, Operation GangUp (OGU) was formed in order to raise awareness and educate the community about gang activity.

Operation GangUp (OGU), a framework developed by the Congressman Lou Barletta and State Senator John T. Yudichak fit well into the community research model established by The Institute. The steering committee consisted of the Congressman, Senator, The Institute, and Chairs of the subcommittees. There were four subcommittees with over 100 combined participants. Education included Pre-K-20+ representatives. Community consisted of non-profit organizations and social service agencies. Law enforcement consisted primarily of local agencies, prisons, and the FBI. The Legislative task force includes other members of the northeast delegation.

**The Institute's  
Regional Task Force Network**



## **Operation GangUp (OGU)**

### **Mission**

To improve public safety in NEPA

### **Purpose**

Lackawanna-Luzerne Regional Gang Initiative - Gang Awareness, Education, Training, and Legal Environment

### **Strategic Priorities**

- Conduct an assessment on crime related to gang activity and provide a profile of the various gang(s)
- Provide information to increase and equalize after school activities across the region to deter kids from gang involvement
- Policy recommendations on any necessary changes to laws governing gang activity
- Provide education, training, and information to educators, community groups and local law enforcement

Operation GangUp (OGU) began in 2011 and was started by U.S. Representative Lou Barletta and State Senator John Yudichak. Its purpose was to raise awareness about gangs and gang activity, and was developed to identify and implement sustainable solutions to deter those who might be tempted to join gangs. The committee decided that the best way to educate the public would be to arrange for several meetings to take place across the county.

The first panel discussion involved D. Darrell Dones, Supervisory Special Agent of the Behavioral Science Unit of the FBI; Kent Lane of the Pennsylvania State Police; Detective Chris Orozco of the Hazleton Police Department and founder of the city's Gang Task Force; and Lackawanna County District Attorney Andrew Jarbola.

They were gathered to discuss strategies that had worked in other counties around the country, and allowed the public to ask questions at the end of the presentation. The goal was to create interest and concern in the community and set the baseline for further meetings and presentations. It was fitting that this first meeting started in Hazleton, as Hazleton is a community that is heavily impacted by gang activity.

The second event took place on February 23, 2012 on the King's College Campus. This panel discussion included a question and answer forum at the end of the program with Special Agent D. Darrell Dones and Intelligence Captain Robert Maguire of Lackawanna County Prison and other gang experts, including Officer Brian Lavan, who serves as Director of Police Operations and Security for the Wilkes-Barre Area School District; Chief Len Mickavicz of the Taylor Police Department, who has served on the U.S. Marshal's Fugitive Task Force and the Lackawanna County Drug Task Force; and David Tosh, the Director of Secondary Education for the Wyoming Valley West School District. Between meetings, Representative Barletta and State Senator Yudichak traveled to different parts of Northeastern Pennsylvania to raise awareness about

gang violence culminating in an agreement with the Luzerne Intermediate Unit (LIU-18) to facilitate gang training session to our educators in Luzerne County during their Act 80 days.

By the third session on May 3, 2012, awareness about gang activity had increased, and as the program continued to grow, it continued to gain success. This third meeting focused on community-based actions. Dr. D. Dones provided another presentation and Detective Chris Orozco made another appearance, along with a panel including members Carmen Ambrosino, CEO of Wyoming Valley Alcohol and Drug Services (WVADS) and a certified Drug and Addiction Counselor; Arthur Breese, who serves as Director of Diversity for Geisinger Health Care Systems as well as President of Northeastern Pennsylvania Diversity Education Consortium; William Browning, who is currently Director of the Lackawanna County Department of Human Services and Children and Youth Services; Angel Jirau, who is the Executive Director and founder of the local Spanish American Leaders Serving All (SALSA) as well as a Community Diversity Activist; Tricia Thomas, who serves as Executive Director of the Boys and Girls Club of Northeastern PA, which provides after school and summer programming for children; and Theresa Tyler-Smith who is the Co-Pastor of New Covenant Christian Fellowship Church and founder/director of BMW (Beyond Morning Worship).

The meeting on September 11 of that same year was to finalize the plan. There was discussion on further training for law enforcement and educators about gangs and gang activity, and a discussion about current legislation in the Senate. A conference call with senators was held to propose amendments to the bill, stressing the definitions of gangs and gang activity in order to give the operation a solid foundation to build upon.

On September 27, the meeting held was meant to discuss a general overview of gangs in the area and what could be done about them. The main focus was that gangs were moving to smaller communities, as police had begun to address gang activities in larger cities. As stated previously, Hazleton is one such town, as it is in-between two major cities. The focus, however, was on gang activity itself and not those who join gangs. Gangs are known to target average, law-abiding citizens whom they see as most vulnerable. Houses without any protection are a prime target for gang activity. Citizens were urged to report incidents of graffiti to the police, as this could indicate gang activity. Crime watches are also being developed, and one already exists in Hazleton. Citizens are encouraged to join local crime watches and share knowledge.

Legislation on local gang activity was passed on October 16, 2012, and included the definition of a street gang, which is a formal or informal ongoing organization, association or group, with or without an established hierarchy that has one of its primary activities the commission of criminal or delinquent acts and that consists of three or more persons. The bill, now in effect, carries severe penalties for persons using force or intimidation tactics, causing physical harm to others, and participating in drug trafficking for a gang. The main purpose is to stop gang activity before it begins.



On November 13, the last meeting of Operation GangUp took place. Its main focus was on gang awareness. The presentation covered ways to identify gang affiliates and discussed why some youth are drawn to gang life. During this presentation, some ways to identify gangs by apparel, symbols, and behavior, specific factors that make gang life appealing, initiation rituals, warning signs of involvement, and ways to address the issues were discussed. There was also a call for “zero tolerance policies” to go into effect in schools to prevent gang behavior and serve as a deterrent for future gang activity. What was really important in this presentation was simply understanding gang life and the effect it can have on the community. By being aware, all citizens are safer, and awareness contributes to a stronger community overall.

## Research

A key component of Operation GangUp involved local research. The Institute prepared a number of papers on various topics related to gangs in Northeastern Pennsylvania.

*Gang Recruitment (The Institute, 2013)*, reviews the modern trends and methods of gang recruitment. Research shows that gang member migration does not fully explain gang problems. Gang-afflicted areas typically have indigenous gangs for at least one year before migration takes place. Therefore, local recruitment must be recognized and understood as the primary source of gang proliferation. Gangs work to increase their size. The bigger they are, the more powerful they are. It should also be understood that Northeastern Pennsylvania, like other regions have a presence of both local gangs and nationally known gangs. Some local gangs are independent and others are affiliated with the nationally known gangs.

At-risk youth exhibit a few common characteristics. They have often recently experienced critical life events, exhibit anti-social or risky behavior, have been exposed to delinquent beliefs, weak parental monitoring, peer delinquency, and/or negative peer influence. Those between the ages of 13 and 15 seem to be a primary target --although a variety of ages, including even college age students and young adults, can become gang recruitment targets. Females continue to play only a minor role in gangs across the country. Racially, gangs are primarily composed of African Americans and Hispanic or Latinos, but gangs become more diverse in race and gender in rural areas and smaller cities and Caucasian participation has increased tremendously over the past decade.

The influence of gangs has begun to spread with the use social media. Some research shows that gangs have used social networking sites to recruit rural members. Gangs infiltrating the military and the professional worlds have begun to worry law enforcement officials. To fund their operations, larger gangs, requiring greater finances, have turned to white collar crime -- such as mortgage fraud -- in addition to the drug trade. This means that non-traditional targets are being pursued.

*Gang Profiles (The Institute, 2013)*, using existing federal research assessing gang threats, Gang Profiles discusses current gang trends and activities in the local region. The report mentions the

influence of New York City and northern New Jersey gangs on eastern Pennsylvania, the types of gangs that are committing to the region and the gangs that pose the greatest threat. These involve various drug trafficking organizations (DTOs), violent gangs that rival one another, and more. The abstract does not include information about newer local gangs operating in the region. The primary purpose for this migration is to engage in drug-related sales in uncontested markets, where they will find greater opportunities with less competition. Other additional motives include legitimate employment opportunities; desire to be in closer proximity to incarcerated friends and family; avoidance of harsher punishments such as “three-strike laws;” and residing in rural areas with less law enforcement presence (pg. 3). By identifying the growing dangers in eastern Pennsylvania, law enforcement and community officials will be more knowledgeable and proactive toward the prevention of drug-related and violent offenses.

The report does not discuss the emergence of local gangs that are forming in communities across the country. Local gangs are individuals from a neighborhood that form their own “gang.” Essentially, these are friends that band together for camaraderie and to engage in unlawful or threatening activity. Police in Northeastern Pennsylvania have noted the formation of many small local gangs.

White Collar Crime (*The Institute, 2013*) More and more frequently, street gangs are placing their guns aside and participating in white collar crimes. Known gangs like the Bloods, Crips, Latin Kings and Gangsters Disciples have been reported stealing identities, engaging in mortgage fraud, counterfeiting checks, and selling counterfeit goods. White collar crime has major financial benefits, and is very difficult to track to a source. White collar crimes attract less attention than drug trafficking and the legal ramifications can be less severe. Street gangs view white collar crimes as a low risk, high reward enterprise.

Selling counterfeit goods and mortgage fraud are the two popular white collar crimes among gang members. Gangs are purchasing properties with the intent to receive seller’s assistance loans and end up keeping the proceeds from the loans or mixing illegitimate finances through mortgage payments. Mortgage fraud often reaches a high when the housing market is doing well and more loans are being issued.

Counterfeiting is also a low risk, but high reward crime that gangs often use to help fund their organizations. A street gang can make tens of thousands of dollars a month selling fake electronics, DVDs, handbags, and clothing — about the same amount as if they were selling a kilogram of cocaine. Money received from selling counterfeit goods can contribute to purchasing weapons, human trafficking, and other gang activity.

Deterring Gang Participation (*The Institute, 2013*), discusses the issue that many communities face— juvenile delinquency, in which adolescents commit delinquent behaviors against the community. These may include acts of violence, vandalism, drug abuse, sales, and trafficking, gang affiliation, and much more. Many of these behaviors coincide and result from similar causes, such as a lack of strong social ties, poor familial structure and supervision, feelings of hopelessness and deprivation of resources, and of course the desire to fit in with certain influential groups of youth. These people are at critical stages of development in their lives, with education being one of the most important components to that process. However, some youth do not have the motivation to excel in their education or invest in themselves, which then leads children down a different and more destructive path. So, with all of these problems facing youth today, what can be done to curve their potentially delinquent patterns of behavior?

Many believe that education and school systems should be the primary target in order to address these problems. However, since one of the main issues concerning delinquent behavior involves poor school attendance and involvement, it is not realistic. This is where after-school programming comes in, as schools institute programs and organizations that facilitate a productive and intuitive environment for students outside of classes. Schools employ all types of programs with the goals of increased adult supervision, building healthy and lasting relationships, developing important skills in both academics and the real world, providing opportunities for sports and recreation, and much more and there are pockets of excellence. However, by implementing after-school programs, youth will become better students and citizens of society with a more productive and healthy lifestyle. Parents see “after school care” as the incentive. After reviewing a number of excellent after school programs across the country, The Institute found an evidence-based model in Pennsylvania that addresses a number of regional issues.

The Institute recommended that the region work to develop and create the SHINE program as a means to address crime deterrence and education enrichment that lead to stronger economic and workforce development outcomes.

## **Training**

Using specially trained law enforcement experts, OGU provided training to school and school district officials, higher education institutions, and community groups from July 2012 to June 2013. Hundreds of educators and community leaders were taught how to recognize gang members and characteristics of potential recruits; learn about the gang activities assigned to elementary, middle, high school, and college students, and how to handle any confrontation with gang member students.

## **SHINE**

In late 2013, The Institute began developing a business plan to evaluate how to replicate the successful SHINE program in Carbon County without changing the parameters that made it successful but customizing it enough to be feasible and effective in Luzerne County. By spring 2014, a business plan and implementation steps were developed.

Project SHINE (Schools and Homes In Education) is an evidence-based successful and nationally recognized after school program in Carbon County. Its mission is to improve academic performance, deter truancy, increase knowledge of STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Mathematics), and encourage family involvement. By bringing schools and families together to build a stronger social and academic foundation for students, SHINE also increases family literacy and deters youth away from the allure of gangs and gang activity.

The participants of the program include Congressman Barletta and Senator Yudichak, both veterans of Operation GangUp, Wilkes University as the educational host, staff members and instructors, as well as students, local businesses, foundations, and organizations that support SHINE, and the kids who will participate.

Students can qualify for the SHINE program as early as kindergarten. Students targeted are those that struggle with reading and mathematics. In-home visits by dedicated SHINE professionals start at this stage, continuing classroom learning at home. As children get older, they get more involved with the program, and have access to learning tools they would not normally see in the classroom. Other tools learned are leadership, organizational skills, performance tasks, vocabulary of the STEAM industries, and communication and creativity. SHINE also has intensive summer camps to further education. The goal is to get students interested in a STEAM field so that they can choose a career or attend college for their chosen career. Middle school SHINE students are paired with high school students who will motivate and mentor them as they prepare for high school and postsecondary education after that.

SHINE studies show that students benefitted from home visits, up to 100 percent improvement in all measures. Students also increased reading and mathematics scores. Delinquency is also decreased because SHINE students are supervised directly after school until their parents can pick them up.

The next steps are vital for starting the program. The Interim Director of SHINE will solidify all arrangements with the schools involved, while creating marketing materials and arranging for the provision of food and transportation. She will also finalize job descriptions and raise funds for the program during this time.

In July of 2015, the Director will recruit administration staff, provide training, and oversee fundraising. She will also confirm the final arrangements with schools, bus companies, and food services.

In August, the Director is in charge of recruiting and training teachers. She will also finalize all details, continue to fundraise, and purchase supplies and equipment.

The program is scheduled to start in September of 2015 in five school districts in Luzerne County: Greater Nanticoke, Hanover Area, Hazleton Area, Wilkes-Barre Area, and Wyoming Valley West. Based on the SHINE program's track record of measurable success in Carbon County, all stakeholders are optimistic that this evidence-based program will lead to a decline in gang activity in Northeastern Pennsylvania by empowering youth to choose a productive path in life rather than join a gang.