When starting up a YouthBuild Program, and you think or you know for a fact that you’re working in a neighborhood that's gang-exposed or you’re planning to work with young people that are gang-exposed, it's really important to take a number of different safety measures into account.

Next is finding out whether you’re in a neutral territory, and if you’re not, what are you going to do about it? So, you’re not right? Obviously, you've identified gangs in the neighborhood. Agencies, neighbors, and what not have helped you identify that. You've got to inform them of your working. That's what you’re all about, going door to door and letting folks know that you’re around.

And also, it really helps if you have what Jimmy talked about yesterday, having an older veterano go through the neighborhood, and tell them, these people are cool. Don't mess with them. Maybe they'll take care of whatever happens. If anything happens, you can talk to me and we'll resolve having somebody be there.

Recruit youth from the neighborhood. That helps a lot. Builds that legitimacy. Again, talk to your neighbors and door-to-door recruitment. You also, when you're doing recruitment, you got to let people know from the neighborhood that your space is a neutral one, like [INAUDIBLE] said. But also let them know that if anything goes down with any of the participants, that we’re going take care of it. They have to trust that you’ll take care of it, instead of having them deal with the situation and then things get worse.

One thing that I really stress and I think is extremely important is for your young people to understand is that your program you're building is a neutral territory, that there's no gangbanging involved whatsoever. And you also need to stress to them that they shouldn't be gangbanging in the neighborhood, immediate neighborhood or gangbang on their way home or on their way to school. Because that jeopardizes your community, and by your community I mean your program.

Early on in the first and second year at La Casa, we were at Centro Maravilla, which is I think there's like five or six different neighborhoods there, right? And the young people constantly got hit up. Eventually, you know, I went to school with one of the dudes that was from the neighborhood and talked to him, and he talked to folks there and they chilled out a little bit. But we realized that we were outgrowing the space. So when we were looking for a new space, we really identified neutral areas in East LA that we should move to. And we found the space.

If folks do gangbang in your program, or the outer perimeter in your neighborhood, and you find out about it, you've got to let them go. Because it's jeopardizing, again, your safety and that of your staff. And then if you do let them go, they know how serious you are.
We've had young people try out for our program three or four times. And the first two or three times, they didn't make it through mental toughness, because they-- maybe the first year they showed up and outright from the beginning, they're still with the gangbanging. They didn't want to leave it behind. The second year, they got there, they improved a slight bit, but they were still with it. And then the third year they finally walked in, they were like, OK. I kind of put all that stuff. I'm ready to do this program. So again, the other thing with that is like, just don't be afraid to say, at this time, you're not ready for our program.

I think there's subtleties, right, within this whole issue of like gangbanging. There's stuff that's not right and it's subtle nuances. An example Frank talked about, is, just a young person going up to somebody and saying, where are you from? Or one of the subtleties is a young person taking off their shirt, if they have their neighborhood tatted on. So those are different things to look at.

Next thing we're going to discuss is safety protocols to take when you're working in a neighborhood that's gang schools or working with gang community people. By this I mean what are the steps are going to be taken if stuff goes down and precautions that need to be taken.

Things as simple as having one main entrance is really important. You might even want to consider, instead of letting young people out to go to lunch out of the building, you might even want to consider bringing in a food truck and catering or offering that type of service to young people. You might want to consider just having young people bring their lunch so that they don't go out into the community and into the neighborhood.

There's a number of different factors that you need to take into account when starting up a youth build program in a gang exposed neighborhood, right? There's a set of safety protocols that you need to discuss with your staff member. What are you going to do if a young person gets into a fight out in the neighborhood? What are you going to do if a rival gang comes into your program, into your building?

Who's going to be called? Are you going to call the police right away? Are you going to try to address that on your own, which is what I recommend. Are you going to kick them out right away? Are you going to sit down with them and try to mediate the issue that's occurring.

Other things to take into account are what you're going to do if a young person gets pulled over by the police on their way to your program or on their way home after your program? How are you going to advocate for that young person? Are you going to advocate for that young person?

These are for building and off site. One thing that we found after many years was limiting access. The second building we moved into with La Casa, we had three different entrances. And at one point, there was some guys from the neighborhood that came in looking for one of our participants. We went back and there was this huge
wide open gate that was left open. He ran into the building looking for somebody. And after that, we shut the door.
It was just a learning process.

Or police.

Or police.

Or police.

Or probation officers not knowing--

I had forgotten about that. Yeah, one time police and probation rolled up in like eight vehicles. And we had all our
doors and gates open. And they just rolled up. It was crazy. We lost a couple of people in that situation. So having
one main entrance helps a lot. Keeping gates and doors closed and if you have uniforms, that helps
tremendously. You can tell folks from the neighborhood, hey, that person has that shirt on, [INAUDIBLE].

I think that also an important part about that, if you do form an agreement with somebody from the local
neighborhood, that you really got to like, let the students know that they’re aware of that. I think at one of our early
on learning process of, we had a student who was gang, but he didn’t get along with one of the local
neighborhoods there. And he did something over the course of the weekend. And Monday, they ran on campus
with a gun.

So we went on lockdown, and myself and one of other staff members went out to the back to talk to this guy. And
we’re talking with him, and he’s saying, oh, you’re this kind of school. You’re this kind of school. Said, no, we work
with everybody here. But this is a neutral site. He’s like, well, if this is a neutral site, you better tell him
that when he goes out on his lunch break, and he wants to be throwing up gang signs, you know, he’s going to be
expected to get follow back to campus. You know, and if it happens again, we’re coming back. And you’re out,
there’s you and one of your other staff members, that’s not something I would recommend for YouthBuild staff
members to do if they don’t have experience with tackling issues such as this.

Ensuring that you have at least one staff member for seven participants supervising. When it gets larger than that,
you lose control and folks take off and start messing around and it just gets tricky. Do folks do this or something
less than this?

It’s that ratio. Always having the ratio, but also being able to work as a team. So if you have a team of folks who
still facilitating and they still don’t have that chemistry to be able to deal with those types of situations.

That’s pretty hard to find. You’ll find that out early before you [INAUDIBLE].
I think for safety, even if you, whenever you're doing any sort of event outside of your facility or a classroom space, it's important to make sure there are two people, even if you just have seven, ten, just in case anything happens, you have someone who can stay, for example, with the group and make sure their grade, they get back to the van. And then you have someone you know, calmly mediating the situation.

Where I know that most of our programs do not have a lot of staff, they just run based on what we need. But I think that that's a great thing to make sure that that's incorporated. We're leaving the site. We're going to make sure there are two staff there. And an easy thing is when you see when they're cool, and also when you see a fist, just, I think it naturally, physically, young people will let you know that I don't safe in this surrounding and I sense like something's going to happen.

So when you have two people, it becomes easier to begin to notice these things. That way folks are able to enjoy and learn from the activity versus thinking about their surroundings. I think that body language, young people will let us know immediately if we pay attention. They don't have to verbalize it.

In addition to body language, it's just their preparation. If you see a young people that carries a backpack, and then from one day to the next, they're carrying a backpack differently, my reaction is that they're carrying something to protect themselves with.

Communication is the next. All these protocols that you come up with, processes, how is that communicated? So, who is the first person that's going to be contacted? Who's the second person that's going to be contacted if that person is not there. And after that, who is the third person that is going to be contacted if that person is not there.

And ensure that everybody, staff and members have all these individuals' numbers. Again, I think it's important to come up with a plan. There's different scenarios that need to come up. And we could spend the entire day going through scenarios. But one thing that I think that I stress to programs is that you need to come up with a scenario that relates to young people getting pulled over by the cops [INAUDIBLE], and in particular, if that young person is on probation or parole.

And the other thing is when do you call the police, determining that as well. So there's again some programs that when there's a fight, they call the police right away and have the police deal with it. I don't think that's necessarily the best approach. So trying to figure out when, you guys decide.

Repercussions of the police not showing up, if that's your-- if that's what you're doing and if the police don't show up, then what--

If that's your only play--
[INAUDIBLE] not show up and that's a high probability for many places.

And also, I think it's going back to what [INAUDIBLE] said, just making sure-- I mean it doesn't necessarily take a relationship with that police station in general. You can actually have a relationship with a senior lead officer or you know, a communications officer. Something that we developed is, we have phone numbers to a majority of the senior lead officers in our area so whatever it is that happens, we can just call them directly and say, you know, this just happened. Can you come over when you have time. They'll let you know, call such and such or [INAUDIBLE].

Another thing to develop is when not to call the cops. So we have a list of when to call the cops and when not to call the cops. And everybody on staff needs to know this. There's some programs that have a staff of like 50 people. They all need to know the--

[INAUDIBLE] up with partners.

Partners, exactly. And I think for you guys, what's in here is a tricky situation, because there's so many partners and staff members.

There's an extra layer of accountability being on a college campus that is monitored by a sheriff's department.

And their first reaction is to call the cops.

Internally we coach folks how can we handle these situations without it becoming a campus wide challenge, because we're acting under that extra layer of accountability. It just takes one phone call to that person, whoever they may be in their office and the whole plug can be pulled. So we definitely have to be strategic.

It's really important to talk to your staff, let your staff know of these safety protocols. Let your young people know of these safety protocols.