

ACTING TOGETHER SSHRC-CURA PROJECT

PREVENTION OF YOUTH GANG-INVOLVEMENT



RESEARCH | TRAINING & EDUCATION
KNOWLEDGE DISSEMINATION | GOVERNANCE

www.actingtogether.ca



Social Sciences and Humanities
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en
sciences humaines du Canada

Canada

Kwantlen POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY

Message from the Project Director

We began our academic-community alliance journey "Acting Together" in year 2009 to find evidence-based approaches to protect our youth from a life of violent crimes and gangs. Together, we made a commitment to coordinate our strengths, expertise, and resources to reach our goal.

The federally funded \$1-million, five-year long project, has remained on track with rapid and steady progress. In two years, we have accomplished a lot, which fuels the enthusiasm and efforts to continue our onward march to meet the targets we have set for ourselves.

All our academic experts have remained busy adding to the knowledge base of "resilience" to understand what factors may keep our youth away from the path of violence and gangster lifestyles. Community voices are continually being integrated through focus groups and interviews. As well, the ongoing dissemination of information through popular media has kept Acting Together on the radar of the community.

Looking ahead, I remain aware that we still have lots to accomplish. The optimism however is at an all-time high. This optimism is rooted firmly on grounds of realistic and careful planning. We have a shared vision and united efforts to lead us through all our tasks. The sense of inter-connectivity that we all have experienced so far will only grow stronger. Restoring the balance by having our youth thriving within our community is inevitable.

Please join me in taking pride of our team achievements as highlighted in this newsletter.

Sincerely,
Gira Bhatt



Dr. Gira Bhatt PI/Project Director of AT-CURA was honoured with an award for "Excellence in Research Innovation" at a community gala hosted by RBC/Mehfil magazine (November 2010). She accepted the award in the spirit of *Acting Together* by quoting a hymn from the sacred text from India.

**Together may we rejoice
Together may our talents shine
Together may we accomplish acts of courage
May there always be harmony among us**

—The Upanishads

Acting Together Steering Committee members with the Vice Principal **Sukh Rai** (5th from left), Frank Hurt Secondary, who addressed the group with great passion on his observations of strengths among high-school students (Feb. 22, 2011)



Surrey High Schools Open Doors to Acting Together Researchers to Survey Strengths of Character, Social Connections, and Cognitive Reasoning

A total of 403 Surrey high-school students from 8th grade participated in the first wave of the research study that aims to identify protective and preventive factors related to youth violence and gang-involvement. Students completed their survey in October 2010, and will be tracked again this summer, 2011. The goal is to identify their social, cognitive, and character strengths such as *courage, honesty, leadership, kindness, self control, altruism, willingness to forgive, and having rational reasons for not committing crimes.*

Additionally, the role of adult guidance and supervision, general family structure and number of hobbies and activities outside school are also being examined. The data is being entered by student researchers and being analyzed on an ongoing basis.



People

Dr. Roger Tweed (Kwantlen) is leading the academic-quantitative part of the research. Along with our Co-Investigator **Steve Dooley** (Kwantlen), he has been responsible for overseeing the successful run of the survey. Our Co-Investigators **Dr. Jodi Viljoen** (SFU), **Dr. Kevin Douglas** (SFU), and expert Collaborator **Dr. Scott McDonald** (Center for Addiction Research, UVic) are integral to this research.

Sharon Cohen (Surrey School District Deputy Superintendent), **Theresa Campbell** (Manager of Safe Schools Program, SD#36), **Kathryn Petersen** (Senior Research Analyst, Surrey School District), **school principals** and **teachers** provided their invaluable support which was instrumental in getting the survey off the ground. The preliminary analyses of the data is underway and the results will be ready for dissemination in Fall 2011.

Thank you to all who have made this possible.

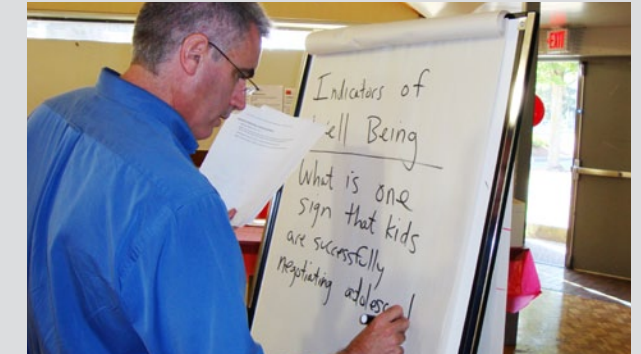


On the right **Dr. Roger Tweed** (Kwantlen): Lead Co-Investigator for Academic-Quantitative research with Co-Investigator **Dr. Jodi Viljoen** (SFU)

Integrating Community Voices: Interviews & Focus Groups

Steve Dooley, our Lead Co-Investigator for qualitative research, has very successfully guided the process of gathering community voices through interviews and focus groups.

Our community Co-Investigators **Gary Thandi** and **Kashmir Besla** have also been very actively engaged in conducting interviews and focus groups, some of which are conducted in the Punjabi language.



Co-Investigator **Steve Dooley** leading a focus group

	Interviews	Focus Groups	Participants
Youth	17	3 (n=16)	53
Parents	4	4 (n=19)	23
Service Providers	5	4 (n=21)	26
Mixed Groups	N/A	6 (n=57)	57

Total Participants=159

May 31, 2011

Other research projects



Co-Investigator **Steve Dooley** (Kwantlen)

Exit Strategies

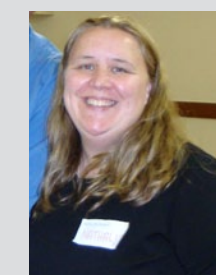
Another study underway is the examination of former gang members to understand the dynamics of exiting from a gang culture for youth who are already gang-involved. **Steve Dooley** and **Andrea Spindler** have already started the foundation pieces of this research by examining past literature and programs. The process of interviewing former gang members will soon begin.



Co-Investigator **Indira Prahnst** (Langara)

Youth Alienation

Indira Prahnst, our Co-Investigator from partner institute Langara College is contributing to research on youth alienation. The aim of her qualitative research is to understand the extent of the sense of alienation that our youth may be experiencing and how that may be related to their vulnerability to drug-related crimes and involvement in violent gangs.



Co-Investigator **Dr. Nathalie Gagnon** (Kwantlen)

Project Evaluation

Our Co-Investigator **Dr. Nathalie Gagnon** is the lead researcher for the evaluation of our project. She has developed a logic model, which has provided a framework for evaluating various components of our project. The performance markers of our ongoing activities and tasks are being assessed which is critical for maintaining a steady track record of the project.



Student Researcher **Brooke Knowlton** transcribing focus group audio in the AT-CURA research centre at Kwantlen's Surrey campus

Special Thanks

Thank you to our student research assistants **Samantha Luangphixay**, **Sara Lewis**, **Marie Ouellet** and **Brooke Knowlton** for undertaking the rather tedious task of transcribing every word from the numerous audio tapes of interviews and focus groups.

Training & Education

BC Ministry of Public Safety & Solicitor General Invites Acting Together Researchers to Lead Workshop

Our Principal Investigator and Project Director **Dr. Gira Bhatt** and Co-Investigators **Dr. Roger Tweed** and **Steve Dooley** were invited on Mar. 25, 2010 to present a workshop following a consultation project they completed for the *BC Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General*. The two-day event was organized by the Ministry with the theme

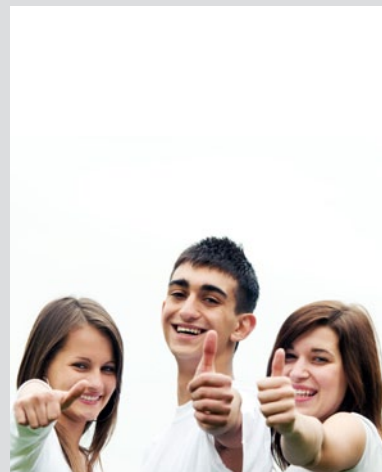
“Preventing Youth Involvement in Gangs: Sharing Knowledge and Celebrating our Success”. The workshop provided a venue for our team to lead the participants through a series of interactive exercises to highlight various domains of youth strengths. The full report is now available on the Ministry website. www.gov.bc.ca/pssg/

Youth Inspiration Event

Keeping our focus on the positive, a youth event was organized at Kwantlen on Mar. 22, 2010 for SD#36 high-school students—our target group. **Rob Rai**, the assistant manager of *Safe Schools* program of SD#36 was an inspiration behind this event.

Fifty-seven high-school youth arrived at Kwantlen for an evening of fun and sharing of own success stories. Local sports heroes highlighted the source of their strengths that led to success. Many door prizes were generously donated by Kwantlen’s Foundation Office and Athletics Department.

A panel of three young local sports heroes briefly talked about their journey to success and athletic accomplishment. The youth were then asked to meet in small groups and come up with a list of strengths of the character and the internal, external, physical, social, and cognitive strengths which they believed likely have contributed to the success of their sports heroes.



The youth were highly engaged in this exercise and provided very favourable feedback as to how much they enjoyed the event, and emphasized how enriching and inspiring it was for them.



Rob Rai, assistant manager of Safe Schools program of SD#36

High-School Youth Spend Summer Building Community Vegetable Garden

The summer of 2010 provided a unique opportunity for 37 high-school youth to gain new skills and a sense of fulfillment through the meaningful and creative work of growing vegetables.

Our team visited the community garden to work side-by-side with the youth and provide barbecue picnics. We also had the chance to interview some of these youth to gain

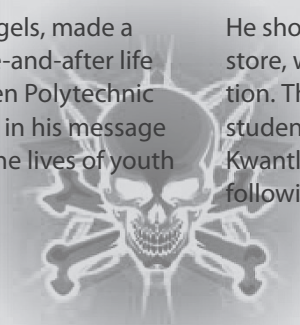
insight into their strengths and perspectives on the issue of youth involvement in gangs.

Supported in part by Coast Capital Credit Union, the youth were given the opportunity to open their own bank accounts and learn the basics of managing their hard-earned money. The Surrey North Delta Leader newspaper covered the creative and successful event.

Former Hells Angel Talks about What Life Was Like as a Gangster

Joe Calendino, a former member of Hells Angels, made a very insightful presentation about his before-and-after life as a gang member on Oct. 7, 2010 at Kwantlen Polytechnic University. He was very candid and powerful in his message about the damages gang life can wreak on the lives of youth who choose it.

He showed a video-surveillance tape of himself robbing a store, which was used as evidence for a prior criminal conviction. The presentation, which was attended by criminology students, psychology students and faculty members at Kwantlen, led to a very stimulating question-answer session following his description of gang life.



Parent-Teacher Night Highlights Value of Arts and Various Career Options for “the Whole Child”

Our partner, the South Asian Student Advocacy by Teachers (SASAT’s), celebrated an evening of education and entertainment supported in part by our project on Oct. 14, 2010. Over 200 parents gathered at the Grand Taj Banquet Hall in Surrey to hear SASAT message about how art and other career and hobby options contribute to a well-rounded “Whole Child”.

The theme was presented by esteemed speakers, singers, and young dancers, as well as through interactive video clips from a popular Bollywood movie “Three Idiots”.

Jinny Sims, the Surrey MP and former president of the BC Teacher’s Federation, **Rick Fabbro**, the assistant superintendent of the Surrey School Board, and **Jennifer Wadge**, vice president of the Surrey Teachers’ Association, addressed the eager parents with inspiring and supportive messages. **Rob Rai**, the assistant manager of Surrey School District’s Safe Schools program, also attended the event.

Dr. Gira Bhatt, our Project Director, emphasized the role of collaboration between teachers, parents, schools, and the community as a whole, to ensure that the youth are allowed opportunities to build their character strengths.

Parents were invited to participate in the AT-CURA project by providing their valuable input on how to prevent youth from entering life of violence and criminal gangs. Co-Investigators **Dr. Roger Tweed** and **Steve Dooley** spoke to parents and helped coordinate the participant recruitment booth, along with student researchers.



Surrey School Teachers and SASAT members **Harpreet Gill** and **Andrea Dulay** who is also our Community Co-Investigator

AT-CURA Team Walks the Talk of Academic-Community Collaboration

Dr. Gira Bhatt led a team of five activists from our community partner organizations for a plenary session at an academic conference held by the Centre for Indo-Canadian Studies at the University of Fraser Valley (May, 2011). In this hour-long presentation, **Kashmir Besla**, our Co-Investigator and a registered family counsellor; **Devinder Chattha** (PICS), a family program manager; **Balwant Sanghera**

(SACCAYV), retired school psychologist and social worker; **Dr. Bikkar Lalli** (Community Activist), a retired mathematics professor and educationist; and **Sarjeet Purewal** (PCRS), a family counsellor; presented an integrated view, blending the academic research and community experiences to examine acculturation, language, education, and family issues that affect immigrants.

Media Broadcast Feature Production by Acting Together and Partners Shaw Cablesystems and Surrey School District

In the AT spirit of collaboration, our expert Media Collaborator **Bob Basil** brought together high-school youth from the **Surrey School District** and the expertise and resources from the **Shaw Cablesystems** to produce a feature video. The youth received training in developing themes for the video and interview questions for experts on gang issues. They also learned how to operate high-tech video cameras and how to edit the films to produce a broadcast video feature. Shaw Cablesystems generously provided the studio, equipment and the professional time of their producer and director **Michael Keeping**. Surrey School District provided their youth workers to accompany the underage high-school students.

The youth interviewed several experts and law enforcement agents at the *Gangs & Guns Training Symposium* held on Feb. 3–4, 2011 at the Vancouver Convention Centre.

Bob Basil oversaw the training, which was spread across several weekends. He worked tirelessly with the Shaw crew to ensure the successful training of the youth and the production of their video feature.



Bob Basil
Collaborator: Media

Knowledge Dissemination

Community Dissemination

- **Gary Thandi** has written about AT-CURA in Drishti Magazine.
- **Indira Prahst** was featured on CBC radio. She also writes regularly for the *Asian Post* newspaper and hosts the *Asian Pulse TV* show.
- **Dr. Bikkar Lalli** regularly hosts shows on Sher-E-Punjab radio on various education and family issues.
- **Andrea Dulay** has been featured on APNA TV discussing AT-CURA project.
- **Balwant Sanghera** has regularly published in the Voice and the Link newspapers.
- **Dr. Roger Tweed** was interviewed and featured in the Surrey North Delta Leader newspaper.

- **Steve Dooley** was featured on APNA TV discussing the AT-CURA project.
- **Kashmir Besla** was interviewed on Omni TV.
- **Dr. Gira Bhatt** was featured on Omni TV, APNA TV, and on Shere-E-Punjab radio. She was interviewed for a featured article in Mehfil Magazine.



Kashmir Besla
Community
Co-Investigator

Academic Dissemination

- **Dr. Roger Tweed, Dr. Gira Bhatt, Steve Dooley, Andrea Spindler, Dr. Kevin Douglas and Dr. Jodi Viljoen's** paper "Youth Violence and Positive Psychology" has been accepted for publication in the *Canadian Psychology* journal.
- **Etta Brodersen** (SFU Graduate Student Researcher), **Dr. Jodi Viljoen, Dr. Kevin Douglas, Dr. Roger Tweed and Dr. Gira Bhatt's** research poster "Comparing resilience factors between gang-involved and non-gang involved youth offenders" is accepted for presentation at the *International Association of Forensic Mental Health Society Conference*, Barcelona, Spain, June 2011.
- **Dr. Gira Bhatt** presented "Writing grant proposal: View from the other side" at Kwantlen's *Connecting Minds: Undergraduate Psychology Conference*, Richmond, June 2011.
- **Dr. Roger Tweed, Dr. Gira Bhatt, Steve Dooley and Andrea Spindler's** research poster "Reasons not to commit crimes" was presented by Dr. Roger Tweed at the *American Society of Criminology Meeting*, San Francisco, November, 2010.
- **Dr. Gira Bhatt, Dr. Roger Tweed and Steve Dooley** facilitated a conversation session on "Protecting youth from gang-involved violence" at the *Pathways to Resilience II Conference*, Halifax, June, 2010.
- **Meiko Assoon** (Kwantlen Undergraduate, Student Researcher), **Dr. Gira Bhatt, Dr. Roger Tweed, and Steve Dooley's** poster "Actor-observer bias in perception of violence" (Meiko's Honors research) was presented by Meiko Assoon and Dr. Gira Bhatt at the annual meeting of the *Canadian Psychological Association*, Winnipeg, June 2010.

Co-Investigator (SFU)
Dr. Kevin Douglas



Meiko Assoon, (Kwantlen) Psychology Honours student presenting his poster at the 2010 Canadian Psychological Association Convention, Winnipeg

Governance



Farewell

A fond farewell to **Andrea Spindler** our Research Coordinator (Oct. 28, 2011). Andrea has moved to Victoria, BC to pursue her professional career. She has graciously agreed to stay connected with the project.

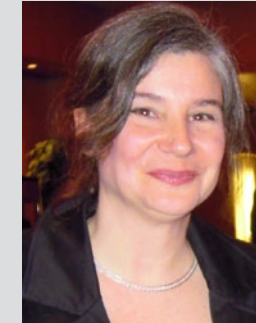
Also, with the governance structure of Acting Together now firmly in place, **Jennifer Matthews**, who helped us achieve that goal, has said goodbye to the team.



Deborah Nowak, Research
Administrator



Catherine Parlee,
Helping with Administration



Sandy Alfonso,
Network Coordinator

Welcome & Special Thanks

Welcome to our new Research Administrator, **Deborah Nowak**.

Special thanks to **Catherine Parlee** of the Office of Research and Scholarship at Kwantlen for helping with the transition.

Keeping us all informed about our activities and achievements is crucial to our collaborative efforts. **Sandy Alfonso**, our Network Coordinator helps us stay connected.



AT-CURA Student Researchers helping at the registration desk for the *Gangs & Guns Training Symposium*, Vancouver Convention Centre, Feb. 3-4, 2011

Student Research Assistants

- **UNDERGRADUATE** Kwantlen Students Antony Mudim, Sara Lewis, Brooke Knowlton, Amber Rothwell, Rahul Abedin, Samantha Luangphixay, Isabel Scheuneman-Scott, Kulbir Randhawa, Daniel Nacorda, Eric Mah, Sabrina Heslton, Sally Chan, Samantha Lim.
- **UNDERGRADUATE** Langara Student Lydia Ng
- **UNDERGRADUATE** UBC Student Sandip Rakhra
- **GRADUATE** Etta Brodersen (MA, SFU), Prabhsharanbir Singh (PhD, UBC)

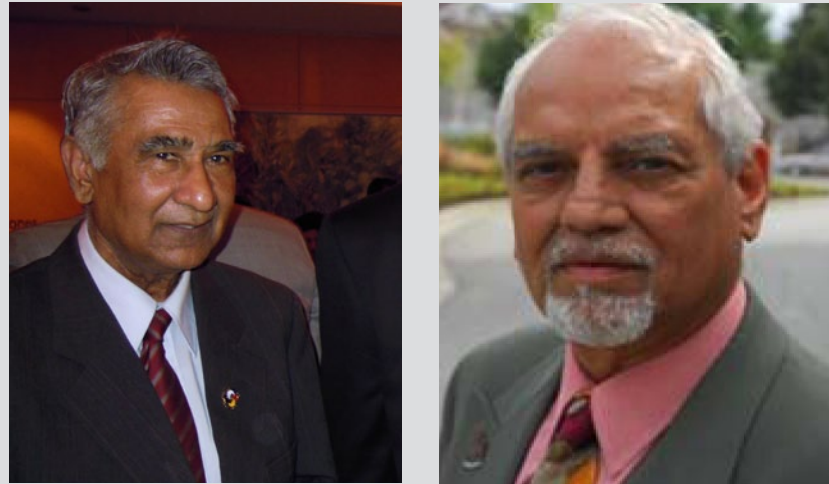
Goodbye

• **Sandra Gutierrez** (Kwantlen) has started her Master's program in the UK.

• **Karen Aujla** (Kwantlen) and **Meiko Assoon** (Kwantlen) and **Thomas Kerlake** (Kwantlen) have completed their Psychology BAA degree with honours.

• **Thomas Kerlake** (Kwantlen) completed his BAA.

• **Marie Ouelette** (SFU) is fulfilling her dream of travels though India.



Our Community Partners **Balwant Sanghera** (left), Chair of SACCAYV and **Charan Gill** (right), CEO of PICS were winners of Canadian Immigrant magazine's "Top 25 Immigrants" award; 2010.



Undergraduate Student Researcher **Antony Mudim** (Kwantlen) was one of Surrey's "Top 25 under 25" award winners for 2011.

Community Partners



Surrey SD #36



City of Surrey



RCMP



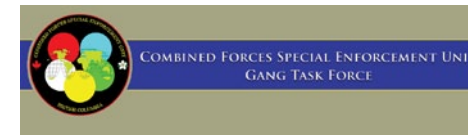
DIVERSEcity



Progressive Intercultural
Community Services



Pacific Community Resources Society



Combined Forces Special Enforcement Unit Gang Task Force



South Asian Community Coalition Against Youth Violence (SACCAYV)



South Asian Student Advocacy by Teachers



Shaw Cablestystems



The Indo-Canadian Voice



Sikh Alliance Against Youth Violence

Academic Partners



Kwantlen Polytechnic University



Simon Fraser University



Langara College



University of Victoria

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