



Gang Management: Identifying and Monitoring Security Threat Groups

Just as neighborhoods across the country search for ways to combat gangs, today's correctional facilities face similar challenges. The National Gang Crime Research Center estimates that nearly one-fourth of male inmates are members of gangs, prompting correctional facilities to develop new strategies and programs and dedicate staff resources to address the growing concern.

Administrators at Corrections Corporation of America have found success in managing gangs by identifying gang members upon initial entry to a facility, and assigning the appropriate housing unit and level of monitoring. This tactic, in the context of CCA's zero-tolerance policy for gangs, has decreased the inmates' ability to organize factions inside the prisons. CCA uses its Inmate Management System, an inmate database of known gang membership and affiliations, photos of gang-culture tattoos and other identifying markings, to track confirmed inmate gang members and to monitor all suspicions of inmate gang affiliations and activities.

In an effort to suppress facility gang activity, correctional administrators and staff members examined strategies from other correctional systems as well as companywide best practices. Administrators from different regions worked to establish an aggressive strategy to address gangs and created what is now CCA's gang management program.

How the Program Works

CCA found that it was important to identify gang affiliations early, using that information to determine the appropriate housing assignment at each facility. In general, new inmates are more likely to provide information, so the admission phase was chosen as the prime timeframe for inmates to undergo a rigorous, one-on-one interview session with a security threat group coordinator – a designated facility staff member responsible for managing gang intelligence, activities and investigations at the facility – to assess the likelihood of gang association. The security threat group coordinator also explains CCA’s zero-tolerance policy for gang activity and strongly advises the inmate to divulge any gang affiliations the facility should know about when selecting a housing location – a key step in preventing violence in the facility.

Additionally, the security threat group coordinator examines the inmate for tattoos and other gang-culture markings that are photographed, catalogued in CCA’s IMS2 database and, if necessary, disseminated to fellow STG coordinators and facility staff for review and awareness. Recognizing familiar markings is often a main factor in the facility’s ability to classify an inmate as a gang member and reduce the potential for violence. Markings and components of the interview that raise concern, or are unfamiliar to the security threat group, are shared with coordinators at other facilities for feedback, essentially creating a comprehensive gang intelligence system. Sharing information throughout the security threat group coordinator network ultimately strengthens the safety of CCA facilities nationwide by helping coordinators to identify new gang trends and neutralize problems before they begin. CCA’s security threat group director helps to facilitate the exchange of information from facility to facility through newsletters, daily

communications and conference calls. Maintaining relationships with law enforcement agencies throughout the country to exchange information is also an important component of the gang management program.

After identification, inmates who are suspected gang members are tracked and monitored daily by security threat group coordinators. Any suspicious or deviant behavior is relayed to staff at each shift change to ensure consistent monitoring and to maintain safety and security of the facility.

Intensive Supervision Units (ISU)

When gang-affiliated inmates display behavioral problems or participate in violent activity, CCA uses designated intensive supervision units – restrictive and structured housing away from the influence of other inmates in the general population. Inmates assigned to these units are isolated and remain there for four months. This allows the correctional facility to remove the high-risk inmate and better manage staff resources. Upon entry into ISU, the inmate will have few or no privileges. As the inmate graduates through levels one through four, he is permitted increases in privileges that may include recreation time, a radio, TV or other electronics, and commissary items (at higher levels).

While in ISU, inmates are required to go through four phases of curriculum with counselors to help curb behavioral problems. The curriculum covers topics including decision-making strategies, life skills, anger management and general self-improvement. The program is designed to gradually reintroduce the inmate to the prison population while graduating to and earning more privileges at each phase. If an inmate becomes a

behavioral problem within 120 days of completing the program, the inmate returns to the program for an additional four-month period.

Once inmates complete the program, they are tracked and monitored by unit staff and security threat group coordinators for at least an additional 12 months. In the 12 months following ISU housing, CCA's Cimarron Correctional Facility reports a 49 percent decrease in disciplinary actions from those inmates who completed the four-month program versus those who have not.

Conclusion

Managing gangs is yet another example of a challenge that correctional facilities must continue to address by developing programs that meet the needs of the inmate population and operational structure of the correctional facility.

CCA manages gangs and gang activity by dedicating staff resources, initiating behavior modification programming and maintaining diligent oversight of its gang intelligence network and database. The program continues to succeed in CCA facilities, largely because of the commitment to global information-sharing and maintaining an open dialogue among inmates, employees and security threat group coordinators.