



California Health Care
Safety Net Institute

*Advancing community health
through California's open door providers*

Fresh Start

A Guide to Tattoo Removal Programs
at California's Open Door Providers

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	ii
Foreword	iii
Overview	1
Program Profiles (by region)	
<i>Southern California</i>	
Arrowhead Regional Medical Center (San Bernardino County)	5
King/Drew Medical Center (Los Angeles County)	6
LAC+USC Health Network	7
UC Irvine Medical Center	8
<i>Central California</i>	
University Medical Center (Fresno County)	9
<i>Northern California</i>	
Alameda County Regional Medical Center	10
Community Health Network of San Francisco	11
Santa Clara Valley Health and Hospital System	12
Other Programs	13

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Foreword

The California Health Care Safety Net Institute is a 501(c)(3) research and education affiliate of the California Association of Public Hospitals and Health Systems dedicated to expanding the capacity of open door providers* and their strategic partners to advance community health.

The institute has identified violence prevention as a primary focus of its community health agenda. Violence-related injuries are often life threatening, usually costly to treat, frequently result in life-long disabilities and entirely preventable. Moreover, acts of violence inevitably lead to further violence, creating a destructive cycle difficult to break. In the fall of 1999 the institute conducted a survey of open door providers and their partners to identify innovative violence prevention efforts currently underway in California that are designed to help address the root causes of violence in our communities.

The results of that survey revealed a scope of programs that is extremely broad and varied, ranging from peer counseling and case management to reduce violence recidivism among youth treated for violence-related injuries to developing effective interventions in cases of family violence to working with community groups to help control handgun violence. The survey also revealed that youth violence, especially that which is associated with gang affiliation, is an area of particular concern for open door providers, because many patients who receive care through their trauma centers are the victims—and perpetrators—of gang violence.

This booklet provides a snapshot of one of the more innovative—and successful—approaches open door providers are taking to reduce youth violence and gang affiliation: tattoo removal programs. These special programs have made an important difference in the lives of thousands of young Californians, and the services they offer remain in high demand. It is important to note, however, that they represent only a very narrow and targeted illustration of the broader array of violence prevention efforts operated by these key health care systems. We hope you will find this booklet to be useful and welcome your comments.



Wendy Jameson, MPH, MPP
Director

*Open door providers are the hospitals, health systems and academic medical centers that share a mission and mandate to serve the health care needs of all Californians, regardless of insurance status or ability to pay.

Overview

Throughout California and across the nation, the popularity of tattoos has increased considerably, cutting across every age and ethnic group and socioeconomic class. By one estimate, one in 10 American adolescents has a tattoo, and over half are interested in getting one. For many, a tattoo is a fun and creative means of self-expression. For others, however, a tattoo can be an all-too-permanent reminder of youthful folly or a way of life better left behind.

This is especially true in the case of gang-related tattoos, where, like distinctive styles or colors of dress, tattoos often become the outward expression or public affirmation of membership in a particular gang. Not only does the presence of a tattoo (or tattoos) put a gang member in physical danger, it can impede his or her efforts to leave gang affiliation and pursue more positive lifestyle changes, including securing a job or returning to school. All too often, gang members looking to make a fresh start discover that what was once a symbol of pride, group identity and loyalty can become an obstacle to pursuing an education, earning a living, or making a clean break from a criminal or violent past.

The tattoo removal programs offered by California's open door providers and others aim to help young people make life changes by eliminating the visible signs of past gang affiliation. Most programs are linked to broader violence prevention efforts that go beyond tattoo removal and seek to address the root social and economic causes for gang affiliation and help individuals gain employment, enroll in school or job-training programs and improve parenting skills. These programs also work to provide support services that reach youth *before* they become involved in gangs. Although they share a common goal, each tattoo program differs slightly from the next in terms of the program organization (including linkages with other community-based programs or support services), participation requirements, scope of services offered, funding sources and evaluation.

Program Design & Structure

Although every tattoo removal program we researched, including some that are not operated by open door providers, is set up differently according to available resources and the specific needs of the community, the following describes the major components typical to most tattoo removal programs.

- *Program Organization*—Each tattoo removal program generally comprises a clinical and social service component. The clinical component involves the physical removal of the tattoo and takes place in a clinical setting (e.g., hospital or health center). The social component, usually conducted by a community-based organization, involves screening applicants to make sure they meet and complete the requirements of the program. The organization

may offer—or provide links to—additional services such as job referrals, parent education and GED preparation. Most removal programs are multi-agency collaborations that involve the police department, probation department, social services department, courts, county offices, hospitals and youth service programs. In some cases, however, a tattoo removal program may be a “stand alone” service, with clients referred by outside agencies (e.g., courts). In one case, local public officials sit on the governing board, a collaborative approach that has been helpful in increasing visibility and local support for the program. Another program plans to expand its services to include early outreach to youth at-risk for involvement with gangs and to provide program participants with more comprehensive services, including family planning, perinatal and smoking/tobacco cessation services. This effort will involve various community based-organizations as well as law enforcement, social and health service agencies.

- *Participation Requirements*—Although most programs do not impose age restrictions, participants are usually between 18 and 25 and include both males and females. Program participants include ex-gang members, recently paroled individuals, recent California Youth Authority (CYA) detainees and others for whom visible tattoos are a barrier to pursuing lifestyle changes, finding employment or ending gang affiliation. The most common requirements for participation are county residency and the completion of community service hours ranging from 20 hours to 80 hours. Some programs require participants to complete community service hours for every treatment, while others require them to complete a set amount of hours before treatment begins. A few programs limit participation to those individuals between 16 and 25 years old, charge a set or sliding fee, or require a referral from an affiliated agency in addition to community service requirements. Generally, participants are allowed to choose their community service organization and, in a few programs, time spent in GED preparation classes, parenting classes or other self-improvement efforts are counted towards the community service requirements. In another example, clients are required to participate for one year in group discussions and activities on topics of the group’s choice.
- *Clinical Services*—Most programs will only remove readily visible tattoos (i.e., those above the neckline, below the elbow, etc.) that impede the individual’s ability to leave gang affiliation or to acquire and maintain employment. Priority is also usually given to those with a tattoo that could cause medical problems. Programs differ in terms of how often they hold tattoo removal clinics, ranging from twice a week to one Saturday every other month. The tattoos are generally removed in community-based clinics or in hospital inpatient or outpatient settings. For the most part, these facilities are donated for the day. The removal procedure is performed using laser technology, and most programs have access to a single laser only,

which limits the number of participants that can be served at any one time. Moreover, most tattoos require between 4 and 7 treatments over several months before they are completely removed.

- *Clinical Staff*—The removal clinics utilize between four and six staff members: one or two physicians, a nurse, clerical assistants and sometimes a few residents or interns who are observing the procedure. For most tattoo programs, staff members are volunteers or their time is paid for by the participating open door provider or through grants. In one case, removal services are performed by graduate physicians in their residency training and supervised by licensed dermatologists. In another case, program nurses are trained to perform all aspects of the tattoo removal, except in complicated cases where a plastic surgeon provides consultation.
- *Funding*—The tattoo removal programs are funded through a patchwork of short-term foundation grants, county funds, community organizations, volunteers and hospital donations either in the form of money, donated professional staff time, equipment or space. Many removal programs depend almost exclusively on volunteers or subsidized payments to professional staff to defray the largest line item cost for these programs: professional staff salaries. While grants from private foundations are significant sources of support, they typically provide funding for the short term only. As such, most programs continually expend resources on researching potential new funding opportunities and writing grant proposals.
- *Demand for Services*— A tattoo removal program's size and scope is usually determined by the availability of resources (i.e., more money means the ability to offer more services). Some programs perform scores of treatments a month, while others serve only about twenty individuals per year. All but a few of the programs listed in this book have long waiting lists for services. (One list is 800 names long.) Demand tends to be greatest in programs that have the fewest requirements for participation (i.e., no community service requirements, no fees). Despite the obvious demand for services, however, many program administrators also report problems with missed appointments, a situation that complicates scheduling and thus makes meeting demand all the more difficult.
- *Outcome Measures and Evaluations*—All of the programs have established protocols for ensuring clinical quality in the tattoo removal programs (e.g., peer review, chart audits). To date, however, none of the programs has developed an assessment tool for formally measuring the non-clinical (i.e., social) impact of the services on participants' lives. Instead, most programs currently rely on feedback from former participants to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of their programs. A few programs ask participants to complete informal written surveys to assist in this process. One program has

embarked on an outcomes engineering project that attempts to translate the individual “life stories” of each participant into hard data.

Challenges for the Future

Although most of the tattoo removal programs have managed to maintain adequate funding to support their efforts over the three to six years they have been in operation, many program administrators report funding issues as an ever-present challenge to the future of their programs and are continually seeking opportunities to secure stable funding sources. Other challenges include keeping up-to-date with the most appropriate and effective treatment methods and equipment, lowering the rate of missed appointments, boosting volunteer participation, expanding services to meet the high demand and establishing formal methods for measuring program effectiveness (both clinical and social outcomes). One area of evaluation in particular that merits further inquiry involves the question of whether the establishment of more stringent requirements for participating in the tattoo removal programs (e.g., requirements to perform community service) is a deterrent to participation, or whether, conversely, such requirements serve to reinforce a participant’s commitment to changing his or her life and contribute to the success of the intervention.

A final challenge is the fact that most of the administrators run these tattoo removal programs in addition to their other jobs. Only by stretching existing resources extremely thin do these programs stay in operation, leaving these part-time administrators little time for additional activities such as grant writing or evaluation. The operation of the programs depends heavily on the commitment of the open door provider institutions to provide staff flexibility and the dedication of the individuals working in those institutions to go far beyond their normal duties. Unfortunately, dedication alone to these programs is not always enough. During the course of creating this resource guide, one open door provider had to suspend its tattoo removal program due to a lack of funding.

Arrowhead Regional Medical Center

<i>Program Name:</i>	Gang Reduction Intervention Program (GRIP)
<i>County:</i>	San Bernardino
<i>Lead Agency:</i>	Arrowhead Regional Medical Center
<i>Contact Person:</i>	Dominic Nigro
<i>Telephone:</i>	(909) 580-6100
<i>Collaborating Partners:</i>	San Bernardino County Department of Probation, Human Services System, and Jobs and Employment Services Department
<i>Target Population:</i>	Residents of the Inland Empire
<i>Participant Requirements:</i>	Must be able to demonstrate that the tattoo is impeding efforts to gain employment or leave a gang and must meet low-income requirements to receive services for free
<i>Referrals by:</i>	Various government and community organizations involved with the criminal justice system
<i>Scope of Services:</i>	Tattoo removal and referrals to other social services
<i>Staff Composition:</i>	One physician, two nurses, a physician assistant and a clinical assistant (all paid as part of hospital staff)
<i>Funding Source(s):</i>	Arrowhead Regional Medical Center (staff, space & equipment) plus some grant funding

King/Drew Medical Center

<i>Program Name:</i>	Tattoo Removal Program
<i>County:</i>	Los Angeles
<i>Lead Agency:</i>	King/Drew Medical Center
<i>Contact Person:</i>	Anniece Williams
<i>Telephone:</i>	(310) 668-4205
<i>Collaborating Partners:</i>	None
<i>Target Population:</i>	Ex-gang members attempting a lifestyle change, court ordered referrals, and working people needing to remove tattoos for employment reasons
<i>Participant Requirements:</i>	\$40 per visit
<i>Referrals by:</i>	No formal referral system; most participants learn of the program through word of mouth
<i>Scope of Services:</i>	Tattoo removal
<i>Staff Composition:</i>	Six physicians available in the dermatology department to perform procedure but machine is rented for two days per month.
<i>Funding Source(s):</i>	King/Drew Medical Center

LAC+USC Health Network

<i>Program Name:</i>	Roybal Dermatology Clinic
<i>County:</i>	Los Angeles
<i>Lead Agency:</i>	Edward R. Roybal Comprehensive Health Center (part of the LAC+USC Health Network)
<i>Contact Person:</i>	Julie Frederick
<i>Telephone:</i>	(323) 780-2214
<i>Collaborating Partners:</i>	None
<i>Target Population:</i>	Court-referred individuals who want to end gang affiliation and the general population
<i>Participant Requirements:</i>	Must be least 18 or with parental consent
<i>Referrals by:</i>	East Los Angeles Municipal Court, community organizations, health care providers and other patients
<i>Scope of Services:</i>	Tattoo removal and general dermatology
<i>Staff Composition:</i>	Board-certified dermatologists, dermatology residents
<i>Funding Source(s):</i>	Los Angeles County Department of Health Services

UC Irvine Medical Center

<i>Program Name:</i>	Tattoo Removal Program
<i>County:</i>	Orange
<i>Lead Agency:</i>	Beckman Laser Institute
<i>Contact Person:</i>	Ruth Bundy
<i>Telephone:</i>	(949) 824-3115
<i>Collaborating Partners:</i>	Orange County Department of Probation
<i>Target Population:</i>	Anyone in need of and able to pay for removal services
<i>Participant Requirements:</i>	\$85 fee per session for those referred through the Probation Department
<i>Referrals by:</i>	Referrals from the probation department, as well as those attempting to leave gang affiliation.
<i>Scope of Services:</i>	Tattoo removal
<i>Staff Composition:</i>	Full reconstructive and cosmetic surgery staff
<i>Funding Source(s):</i>	Beckman Laser Institute and UC Irvine

University Medical Center

<i>Program Name:</i>	Tattoo Removal Program*
<i>County:</i>	Fresno
<i>Lead Agency:</i>	University Medical Center (part of Community Medical Centers)
<i>Contact Person:</i>	Lynn Campama
<i>Telephone:</i>	(559) 459-3554
<i>Collaborating Partners:</i>	California Youth Authority
<i>Target Population:</i>	Fresno county residents (under 25), recent CYA detainees and those on probation seeking to re-enter the workforce
<i>Participant Requirements:</i>	Determined by referring agency and may include community service and/or completion of life change programs
<i>Referrals by:</i>	California Youth Authority, Probation Department, Proteus, Economic Opportunity Commission, Hope Now for Youth, Salvation Army and self-referrals for those with recommendations from a community organization or leader
<i>Scope of Services:</i>	Tattoo removal and various services provided by referring community organizations including employment and youth services
<i>Staff Composition:</i>	Medical director, nurse practitioner, physician, LVN, part-time program director
<i>Funding Source(s):</i>	Community Medical Centers & CYA

*Program temporarily suspended in September 2000 due to funding constraints

Alameda County Medical Center

<i>Program Name:</i>	Project New Start
<i>County:</i>	Alameda
<i>Lead Agency:</i>	Alameda County Public Health Department
<i>Contact Person:</i>	Adrianna Alvarado
<i>Telephone:</i>	(510) 628-7818
<i>Collaborating Partners:</i>	Highland Hospital, court-appointed Special Advocate, East Bay Asian Youth Center, East Bay Conservation Corps, Fred Finch Youth Center, La Clinica de la Raza, N.E.L.—Centro de Juventud, Office of Indian Education, Summit Women’s Center, Volunteers of America, West Oakland Violence Prevention Project and others
<i>Target Population:</i>	Young men and women of Oakland who want to end a lifestyle that places them and others at risk of violent injury or death
<i>Participant Requirements:</i>	Must develop and commit to a vocational plan and perform at least 50 hours of community volunteer work
<i>Referrals by:</i>	Probation department, schools, community centers and other community agencies
<i>Scope of Services:</i>	Tattoo removal plus basic job skills training (e.g., filling out job applications, resume writing, interview techniques, etc.)
<i>Staff Composition:</i>	Public health workers, physicians, laser technician, nurses, psychiatrist, front office worker, medical assistant
<i>Funding Source(s):</i>	Alameda County Public Health Department, private donations, City of Oakland

Community Health Network of San Francisco

<i>Program Name:</i>	Second Chance Tattoo Removal
<i>County:</i>	San Francisco
<i>Lead Agency:</i>	Community Health Network of San Francisco
<i>Contact Person:</i>	Jackie Caesar
<i>Telephone:</i>	(415) 206-3018
<i>Collaborating Partners:</i>	Boys & Girls Club of America, Caracen, Horizons Unlimited, Juma Ventures, Real Alternatives Program, Teenage Preparatory Program
<i>Target Population:</i>	Local, low-income youth between 13-24 years of age seeking to leave gang life and re-enter the mainstream. The program targets the City's Mission district in particular.
<i>Participant Requirements:</i>	Clients must complete 50 hours of community service
<i>Referrals by:</i>	Caracen (a Central American resource center) screens the candidates and provides case management in collaboration with the medical center staff.
<i>Scope of Services:</i>	Tattoo removal and access to other services and resources provided by Caracen including, employment, legal, dental and medical services
<i>Staff Composition:</i>	RNs with consultation by reconstructive surgeons
<i>Funding Source(s):</i>	Community Health Network of San Francisco and the California Youth Authority

Santa Clara Valley Health & Hospital System

<i>Program Name:</i>	Clean Slate
<i>County:</i>	Santa Clara
<i>Lead Agency:</i>	Santa Clara Valley Medical Center
<i>Contact Person:</i>	Priscilla Carrasquilla
<i>Telephone:</i>	(408) 885-7900
<i>Collaborating Partners:</i>	Catholic Charities, California Youth Authority and other community-based organizations
<i>Target Population:</i>	San Jose residents committed to making a life change
<i>Participant Requirements:</i>	Must attend “group” for one year (twice a month for the first six months)
<i>Referrals by:</i>	Various community organizations
<i>Scope of Services:</i>	Information and referrals to other services, programs and opportunities available through the city (e.g., job training, interviewing skills); monthly group meetings on various topics for program participants
<i>Staff Composition:</i>	Two physicians, one nurse and residents (doctors and nurses are paid)
<i>Funding Source(s):</i>	Santa Clara Valley Medical Center, City of Santa Clara and Valley Foundation

Other Programs

In addition to the tattoo removal programs listed in this book, interested parties seeking more information about tattoo removal programs operating in California may also wish to contact the following organizations.

Program: Kaiser Foundation Hospitals Project Newstart (Fremont) & Hayward Newstart (Hayward)

Contact: Jennifer Scalon

Telephone: (510) 784-2887

Program: Providence Holy Cross Medical Center (Mission Hills)

Contact: June Wilkerson

Telephone: (818) 898-4416

Program: San Mateo County Probation Department

Contact: Lance Judd

Telephone: (610) 877-5759

Program: City of Santa Clarita Tattoo Removal Program

Contact: Sharon Roenfelt

Telephone: (661) 284-1401

Program: Ex-It Tattoo Removal Program

Contact: Paul Callanan and Kathy Hansen

Telephone: (909) 387-6955

Program: Hollywood Sunset Free Clinic

Contact: Juan Roca

Telephone: (323) 660-7959

Program: Huntington Memorial Hospital

Contact: Betty Dumas

Telephone: (626) 397-3376

Program: Northeast Community Clinic

Contact: Gloria

Telephone: (323) 256-3884

Program: Liberty Program at St. Francis Medical Center

Contact: Evangelina Diaz

Telephone: (805) 566-0903

Program: Shield Medical Clinic

Contact: Paul Wallace

Telephone: (310) 652-8460



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