

Gang Prevention Strategy: Tattoo Removal

MOST PEOPLE DON'T think that tattoos are a health problem.

But when your tattoo brands you as a gang member it can literally threaten your life and the lives of those around you.

Even when a person leaves a gang, his or her tattoo can trigger an attack from a rival gang and keep them from getting a good job. Yet, there are only a few public clinics that provide low cost/no cost tattoo removal programs in the County. Medi-Cal and other insurance plans do not cover tattoo removal. Private treatments are expensive, costing up to \$2,000 a tattoo.

Seven years ago, QueensCare saw tattoo removal as a healthcare problem and created the Next Step Tattoo Removal Program at its East LA QueensCare Family Clinic. Two years later, the El Monte Police Department joined QueensCare to help fund the program. Next Step treats about 300 people a

year at no charge. Those accepted into the program are recommended by either the parole and probation offices, or by agencies involved in recovery from substance abuse.

Participants in Next Step don't have to pay money, but they do pay a steep price in commitment. Removing tattoos is a lengthy and painful process requiring a series of ongoing regular visits to complete. Each tattoo takes 6 – 12 laser treatments, applied every 8 weeks. For some tattoos, it can take up to two years to fully remove them.

Yet, few Next Step participants drop out. They know they are lucky to be given this opportunity. New clients are accepted only a few times a year, and openings are filled immediately. The need for low cost/no cost tattoo removal is overwhelming.

Removing gang tattoos makes everyone safer, and we need your help to expand and develop more health programs like this.

As a faith-based organization, QueensCare strives to provide, directly and with others, accessible healthcare for the uninsured and low-income individuals and families living in Los Angeles County.



1300 N. Vermont Ave., Ste. 1002 • Los Angeles, CA 90027
323 953-7341 • www.queenscare.org