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## Man Recalls Life In A Minneapolis Gang

MINNEAPOLIS (WCCO) — With at least three gang-related shootings in Minneapolis this year, officials are admitting to gang problems in certain parts of the city.

While police don't actively keep track of gang-related violence there has been a number of gang incidents this year.

One man, who is affiliated with one of the more popular gangs in Minneapolis, said it's a tough lifestyle to live.

Yahzerah Brazelton, also known as Z, has been in the gang since he was a young kid.

"When I joined I was like 12 -- but I was like 8 when I called myself affiliated," he said. "When I joined the gang, I guess it was a sense of belonging to something."

Now, he is 37 years old. He said usually after 35 the gang stuff slows down.

"I wouldn't consider it still in the gang, you know. After you get a certain age, it's like you can retire," he said. "So I'm past that age of retirement."

He admits he did some pretty bad things.

"You know, I sold drugs, I gang banged, toled guns, organized little events and stuff," he said.

And those things came back to haunt him.

"Woo, I didn't think I was going to make it to 18," Brazelton said.

In one incident of gang retaliation, Z was shot for as he puts it, being at the wrong place at the wrong time. He was shot in the nose, chin and there's a bullet still lodged in his neck. The doctors couldn't remove the bullet in his neck because it's too close to his spine.

"This scar? Woo, Indianapolis. Messing with the wrong person. He cut me with a knife. Had a hole in my face, my tongue could go through my face," he said.

In another incident, he was sliced across his abdomen and needed stitches. He said the reasoning behind gang violence has a lot to do with a lack of self respect.

"It's their ego. They let their ego get in front of reality. They worry about their image instead of worry about reality that you're a human being. I don't understand why somebody would want to take a human life," he said. "If young men could come to know themselves, to understand themselves, better -- don't worry about the ego or the image that they're portraying -- I don't think there would be so many senseless killings."

He said a lot of that image confusion comes from a misunderstanding of who they really are.

"Once I learned myself and knew who I was as a person, it was humbling," he said. "It don't matter what the next person says, I'm not going to fight or shoot."

Brazelton is putting action behind his words. He's going to school for carpentry.

"I want to be a part of the change. I feel I'm obligated to be a part of the change," he said. "I've been a part of the destruction for so long. Now it's time for me to be a part of the change."

Brazelton has been going to Summit Academy OIC for a couple of months.

He hopes to get a good job so he can support his family.

He also said he wants to counsel young kids so they don't follow in his footsteps.

*Sonya Goins, Producer*

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Yahzerah Brazelton, 37, has been affiliated with a Minneapolis gang since he was 8 years old.  
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