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**Ex-gang members who have become help-
professionals: What influences their desistance from gang
involvement and their career choice?**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Social Work in Social Work at Massey
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ABSTRACT

The growing population and changing structure of New Zealand gangs have been observed since the 1950s. Well-documented international and local research provides ample information about the process of gang affiliation and gang desistance. However, there is little specific knowledge generated nationally and internationally about the phenomenon of redemption-self (Maruna, 2001), which refers to male ex-criminal gang members taking part in generative exercises such as mentoring youth or counselling substance users. The present study recognises the gap in the literature and aims to develop a discussion and start a dialogue about the benefits of this little-appreciated uncommon phenomenon. To provide deeper understanding of what triggered and hindered ex-criminal gang members' adoption of redemption-self, the qualitative study design, located in the social constructionist framework has been applied. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews with six male former-criminal gang members who have been working in the social service fields in New Zealand for at least two years. Through the thematic analysis of the men's stories four primary themes emerged, which were organised into a thematic map. The primary themes present a continuum that starts with the men's negative childhood experiences attributing to the later stage gang affiliation. The complicated, and often, zigzagged path trajectory of gang desistance, which was triggered by internal changes and external impacts, prepare the final theme's essence - the adoption of redemption-self. Alongside the advantages and benefits of having experience in both the gang and conventional world when service provision is conducted, the difficulties of being accepted into the field with past criminal-gang affiliation is discussed. The four primary themes' content provides the basis of this discussion. The conclusion of the thesis draws on local and overseas programs and initiatives to formulate recommendation for policies, educational initiatives and implications for future research topics.

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