

## The History of the “Gang Lifestyle”

The etiology of gangs dates back to the early vagabonds who roamed the country pillaging towns and wreaking havoc. We hear stories of pirates terrorizing on the high seas and in portside villages and of outlaws in the Wild West waging gun fights and robbing townspeople. In the late 1800s on the East Coast, as the population shifted towards an urban lifestyle, street gangs began to take shape. The popularity of street gangs rose in the 1920s and 30s with mobsters and then the development of the more sophisticated mafia in the 60s and 70s.

By the late 70s and early 80s, street gangs became a lifestyle with the expansion of national drug network sales and the creation of national gang alliances. The 1980s saw a rise in gang violence and a new movement in “turf wars” - the most notable between the Crips and Bloods of Los Angeles. Movies like “Scarface” and “Colors” glorified the gangster lifestyle.<sup>1</sup>

Though the majority of street gangs still engage in crimes - including graffiti, vandalism, loitering, and violence - with the innovations in technology and the World Wide Web, gangs are now moving into more sophisticated crimes including identity theft and counterfeiting. The majority of gangs in Orange County are turf-oriented and are involved in drug sales and robberies, keeping local community members “in check” and recruiting young boys and girls into this lifestyle of violence and crime.<sup>2</sup>

## General Reasons for Gang Membership<sup>3</sup>

The primary age group of criminally active gang members generally ranges from 13 to 21 years. Youth enter into the gang lifestyle for several reasons. According to research, the two most commonly observed are: (1) social reasons—youth join to be close to friends and family members (especially siblings or cousins) who are already part of the gang and (2) protection—youth join for the presumed safety they believe the gang will offer them. Other reasons include money making, drug selling or coercion to join.<sup>4</sup>

Members feel that they cannot achieve an identity in their environment, so they gain it in the gang culture. They often imagine themselves as “warriors against the outside world, protecting their

neighborhood.” A second reason involves protection. A gang member in a community where other gangs exists is offered considerable protection from violence and attack from rival gang members. Third, studies indicate that a tight family structure is lacking in the home environment of potential gang members. Gang involvement offers that closeness, that sense of family that is often lacking in the home. Lastly, intimidation plays a role in the recruitment into gangs and can become very dangerous. New members are forced to join by threats, violent beatings, and initiations in an effort to increase membership.

Gang membership is not exclusive of certain ethnic groups or geographical locations. Unlike those in the past, gangs have now moved towards mixed ethnic and socio-economic groups. Gangs wage wars for territorial control and control of the drug market in local communities. School personnel, parents and community members need to be aware of these dynamics in their schools, homes, and in the community at large.

The Supplemental Table on page 189 indicates the risk factors identified for gang involvement for youth ages 0-17. For a comprehensive listing of indicators under each risk factor and their associated programs to address the risk, visit the National Youth Gang Center Web site (<http://www.iir.com/nygc/tool/>).

## There are a variety of personal reasons for young people joining gangs.

Youth may be lured by the excitement of the gang lifestyle; they feel a need to belong, peer pressure to join, attention seeking, financial gain, family tradition, and the lack of understanding around the dangers of gang membership. Parents need to engage in open communication with their children and be aware of what and who is involved in their child’s life.

## Implications for Youth

As policing around gang activity has increased, the face of gangs has changed to elude easy identification and developed under the guise of less threatening names. We now hear of tagging or party crews which, by definition, are still considered gangs in that they are a self-formed association of peers having three or more members, ranging in age from 12 to 24; with a

Note: Please see pages 191 for footnote references.

## GANG MEMBERSHIP

name and some sense of identity, which may be represented via symbols such as style of clothing, graffiti, and hand signs; some degree of permanence and organization; and an elevated level of involvement in delinquent or criminal activity.<sup>6</sup>

These tagging and party crews are not unlike the dance crews or car clubs of previous decades – eventually, they morph into gangs. Many of the tagging crews from the 1990s have changed their names and become involved in violent and criminal gang activity. “Destroying Highways”, a tagging crew from Anaheim, became “Devious Hoodlums” evolving into a more violent and typical criminal street gang and away from a so-called tagging crew.

Gang members have developed their knowledge of the law and, as a result, have minimized their visibility. Whereas before, there was a high level of pride associated with gangster symbolism (e.g., style of clothes, tattoos, and hand signs), it is not as easy to identify a gang member out on the street. As a result, a growing number of youth can be recruited without being obvious to parents, teachers, law enforcement officials, or community members.

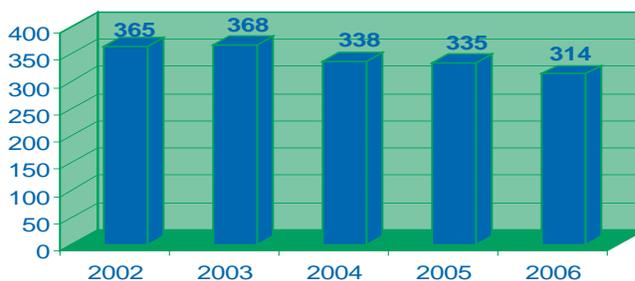
Data consistently show that gang members are responsible for a disproportionately high number of crimes committed by youth offenders. Compared to other delinquent youth, gang members are more extensively involved in serious and violent criminal behavior. Research shows that within a 15 year span gangs have moved from a concentration within a small number of large cities to being “a regular feature of the urban landscape”.<sup>7</sup> From a societal standpoint, the issue of juvenile gangs is one that requires swift action both for the well-being and safety of communities and the youth who get caught up in this dangerous lifestyle.

The total number of known gangs in Orange County is 314 gangs. The most recent data on the number of juvenile gang members, under 18 years of age, is 1,205 (9.2% of total gang population). In 2006, the number of juvenile gang deaths was 10 (29% of the victims were 17 years or younger out of a total of 35 gang related homicides).<sup>2</sup>

### The Success of Prevention & Intervention<sup>8</sup>

Local law enforcement has been proactive in combating gang activity. In the last 20 years, the District Attorney's (D.A.) office has developed

Known Street Gangs in Orange County



Source: Orange County District Attorney

specialized units to address gang activity including the Gang & Graffiti units. The Tri-Agency Resource/Gang Enforcement Team (TARGET), initiated in 1992, has been innovative by joining the efforts of police departments, probation and prosecutors into a team throughout communities in Orange County.

TARGET focuses its efforts on the most hardcore, violent, repeat criminal street gang offenders, especially gang leaders. The goal of TARGET is to incapacitate these gang members before they can commit further violent acts in the community. Focusing on the most active hardcore gang offenders promises the greatest reduction in overall street gang violence.

One of the newest innovations with this unit involves filing injunctions against gangs. The Orange County D.A. extensively uses the Street Terrorism Enforcement and Prevention Act, to prosecute gang members actively participating in criminal street gangs and seeks the stiffest possible penalties for crimes committed for the benefit of, associated with, or under the direction of criminal street gangs.

The D.A.'s office brings a civil lawsuit against a particular gang in a particular neighborhood – suing each individual gang member. These injunctions serve several purposes: they make it hard for gang members to hang out with each other [and enforce curfew]; they afford members a way out of the gang; there is a significant reduction in crime; and, community members take back ownership of their neighborhoods.

The Orange County Probation Department operates a number of facilities targeting juvenile offenders and at-risk populations with funding from the 2000 Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act. There are 10 programs that cover prevention, intervention,

suppression, and confinement. Below are some of the services catering to youth at risk of gang involvement.

## Decentralized Intake

This program provides immediate counseling and diversion services for youth in unincorporated areas and cities served by the Orange County Sheriff's Department. In 2005/06, 1,676 juveniles were referred to diversion or probation services. One year after referral, 87% participants had no new law violation arrests. Participants also show a lower re-arrest rate than those not receiving diversion services (13% vs. 24%).

## Truancy Response Program

The goal of the program is to reduce truancies by targeting chronic truants who have not responded to traditional approaches. In 2005/06 there were 424 juveniles referred to Probation/D.A. for consultation. Fifty-five percent of the Orange County school districts actively participated in the program and reported an overall decline in truancy rates. Truant youth referred to probation showed a 38% reduction in truancies in the six months following referral.

## School Mobile Assessment And Resource Team (SMART)

The SMART program aims to reduce violence on or near school campuses. SMART team members consist of staff from the D.A.'s office and the Orange County Sheriff's Department. Team members respond to calls reporting violence or threats of violence and perform threat assessment and threat reduction follow-up. In 200/06 the SMART team responded to 352 service calls and came in contact with 348 juveniles. Based on the Healthy Kids Survey, 96% of students in the target area reported feeling safe.<sup>7</sup>

## The 8% Early Intervention Program

Started in 1994, this program focuses on minors ages 15 or younger at the point of their first or second Probation referral for an alleged crime. The term comes from a study showing that upon release, 8% of juveniles are chronic repeat offenders. The study looked at the lives of these youth - not the crimes committed and revealed the risk-factors that were prominent in their lives. These risk factors include: delinquent peers, chronic runaway or a pattern of stealing; significant

family problems (abuse, neglect, criminal family members, and/or a lack of parental supervision and control); significant problems at school (truancy, failing more than one course, or a recent suspension or expulsion); and, a pattern of drug and/or alcohol use. Services are offered at local Youth & Family Resource Centers (YFRC).

In 2005/06 the YFRCs served 281 juveniles and their families. The program emphasizes the strengthening of the family unit, school attendance, academics, and teaching pro-social values with younger youth. Youth are held accountable for their actions, which can include paying restitution, fines, and community service. The older high-school-age youth receive vocational guidance and work experience. In addition, they learn skills that will help them to live on their own, such as family budgeting and maintaining a check book.

## Youth Leadership Academy (YLA)

The YLA, a 120-bed, non-secure, co-ed treatment facility, opened its doors in July 2006. YLA provides a comprehensive residential program designed to enhance competencies through remedial education, rehabilitative treatment programs, substance abuse programs, mental health services, and community outreach opportunities. Probation has partnered with agencies including the Orange County Department of Education to provide education and the Healthcare Agency to provide health services to the youth as well as mental health services to youth and their family.

YLA's population primarily consists of non-security youths between the ages of 14 to 19 that are at moderate risk to re-offend and have noted problems with aggression, pro-social attitudes, and/or pro-social skills. Programming involves minors participating in two to three small group sessions per week for 10-12 weeks. Additional rehabilitative programming include: anger management; drug and alcohol awareness; victim awareness; character and values education and development; social skills training; and gang intervention. Group discussion of specific issues, role-playing, homework, and repetitive review are utilized to effect a change in the way minors think about themselves, others, and their world.

Note: Please see pages 191 for footnote references.