

San Benito County: Alternative Solutions to Youth Crime Activity

**Conducted by
Gang Activity Review Committee**

Issued July 31, 2008



**County of San Benito
Civil Grand Jury
2007-2008**

SAN BENITO COUNTY: ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS TO YOUTH CRIME ACTIVITY

SUMMARY

The 2007-08 San Benito County Civil Grand Jury began early in its term to interview public officials to discover what they considered were the major concerns within their jurisdictions. Crime, in particular gang-related crime, was among the top issues of most of these public officials. Like other California communities, criminal gang activity in San Benito County has been steadily increasing over the years. Street gangs, in general, recruit members from the youth population within a community. Local law enforcement officers have expressed that the influence of street gangs has been infiltrating into the elementary grades. Concerned about increasing gang activity in San Benito County, the Grand Jury formed a special committee to study what alternatives are available to help prevent children and youth from joining street gangs.

PURPOSE OF INQUIRY

The Grand Jury formed a special committee to study the alternative solutions that are available within the community to stop the rise of criminal gang activity. The committee's intent was to investigate the following questions:

- What is the extent of street gang activity in San Benito County?
- What are law enforcement agencies and public officials doing to stop the rise of gang crime?
- What programs are available to prevent children and youth from joining street gangs?
- What programs are available to intervene between youth and the gangs they have joined?

METHODOLOGY

Several members of the Grand Jury formed a special committee to study alternative solutions to the gang-related activity within the community. This committee conducted interviews with elected and appointed officials of the City of Hollister and San Benito County. It also interviewed personnel of local law enforcement agencies and other public agencies as well as members of community-based groups. In addition, jurors reviewed various written and online materials related to issues about criminal street gangs, gang activities, and gang-related crime. Furthermore, jurors read newspaper articles (published between 2003-2008) from the local newspapers about gang-related problems in San Benito County.

DISCUSSION

Criminal Street Gangs

A criminal street gang, according to California law, is defined as three or more members of an existing organization (formal or informal) that is engaged in the commission of certain crimes, such as robbery, homicide, controlled substance trafficking, drive-by shooting, burglary, carjacking, and felony vandalism. In addition, the criminal street gang uses a common name or a sign or symbol that makes them easily identifiable.

Furthermore, members are involved in a pattern of criminal gang activity, whether as individuals or as a group.

Local law enforcement personnel stated that criminal street gangs in San Benito County have existed for many years. The most prevalent ones are two opposing Hispanic gangs known as the Norteños and the Sureños.

Street gangs, in general, recruit members from the youth population within a community. Local law enforcement personnel expressed that the influence of street gangs has been infiltrating into the elementary and middle grades. Local law enforcement personnel, as well as public officials, commented that some families have two or three generations of family members participating in street gangs.

Lack of Gang-Related Statistics

Formal statistics that cite the number of gang-related crime or the trend of gang activity in San Benito County does not exist. Law enforcement personnel expressed that they lack the manpower to generate such statistics. Public officials, interviewed by the Grand Jury, stated their concerns about the rise in gang-related crime. At the same time, they said they did not know what the statistics were for gang-related crime in our county.

Prevention, Intervention, and Suppression of Youth Gang Activity

Most, if not all, law enforcement personnel and public officials agreed that everyone in our community needs to be involved in resolving the problem of youth crime activity. They cited that effective anti-gang efforts begin with partnerships among parents, schools, law enforcement, religious institutions, community organizations, businesses, and youth. Furthermore, public officials, law enforcement authorities, community leaders, educators, mental health practitioners, and others stated that a combination of prevention, intervention, and suppression programs are needed to successfully stop the rise of criminal street gang activity among our youth.

Law enforcement personnel maintained that the purpose of prevention programs is to keep children and youth from joining street gangs. The role of intervention programs is to persuade and encourage youth in gangs to leave them. Suppression programs are established to stop and reduce gang crime. This is the role of law enforcement agencies. This includes the prosecution and consequential incarceration of criminals and the management of probation and parole systems.

Suppression: Local Law Enforcement Agencies Working Together

According to statements made by public officials to the Grand Jury, the Sheriff's Office and the Hollister Police Department are cooperating to handle the gang crime problem.

In Spring 2008, an intergovernmental committee was formed to address ways to suppress and reduce gang crime. This committee is composed of members of the two law enforcement agencies as well as public officials from both the county and City of Hollister governments.

Law Enforcement Staffing

Law enforcement personnel described the routine patrol beats to Grand Jury, noting specific areas in our community where criminal gang activity is more prevalent. Because of a lack of manpower to cover beats, local law enforcement agencies are unable to maintain a steady presence within those areas to suppress gang activities.

Crime Prevention and Intervention Programs

Many organizations within San Benito County offer social, recreational, sports, educational, after-school, employment, and other programs for children and youth. These organizations may be community-based, church-based, or part of public agencies or schools. The YMCA, 4-H, Hollister Little League, Hollister Recreation Department, Go Kids, Inc., San Benito County Free Library, and League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) are just a few such organizations that successfully serve the interests of children and youth within our county.

In contrast, there are few crime prevention programs developed for children and youth and their families, according to the public officials and others interviewed by the Grand Jury. All interviewees agreed that there is a particularly strong need for crime prevention programs at the elementary school level. All interviewees—law enforcement personnel, youth counselors, public official, and community leaders, alike—expressed that funds are unavailable to create and implement crime prevention and intervention programs.

The Grand Jury is aware that, among the schools in this county, only San Benito High School has some type of crime prevention program. It has an anti-gang policy, which outlines prevention and intervention measures. This high school also has a school resource officer program through the San Benito County Sheriff's Office. However, the implementation of this program is dependent on available funds.

City of Hollister Officials mentioned plans to fund two patrol officer positions that would be assigned to school patrols within Hollister. Financial support for these positions is contingent on the actual collected Measure T funds (the additional 1% sales tax law passed by Hollister voters in November 2007).

Suspended Crime Prevention Programs

In years past, the Hollister Police Department sponsored several programs to educate the public about crime prevention as well as to recognize gang activity. The programs were discontinued due to budget cuts. They include:

- **Neighborhood Watch:** a crime prevention program that involves local residents working together with law enforcement officers to reduce crime.
- **Drug Abuse and Resistance Education Program (DARE):** a youth drug prevention program.
- **Youth Academy:** a 7-week program that teaches young persons the policies and procedures of the police department
- **Citizen Police Academy:** a 12-week program that teaches citizens the policies and procedures of the Hollister Police Department.

In addition, the Hollister Police Department suspended an early intervention/community service program for at-risk youth known as the **Juvenile Impact Program**. The department, along with the San Benito County Probation Department, collaborated with Hollister middle schools and high schools to create positive changes for first-time juvenile offenders.

According to Hollister officials, the City is planning to reinstate the Juvenile Impact Program through Measure T funds. It is not known when this will take place.

Prevention Programs for Elementary-School Children

It was commonly noted by interviewees that elementary schools were the best place to start educating children and introducing them to positive relationships with law enforcement. However, the Grand Jury has not learned of any crime prevention programs being implemented at elementary school campuses in San Benito County.

FINDINGS

- F1.** No gang-related crime or gang activity statistics are available.
- F2.** No single person or agency is officially responsible for data collection of gang-related crime and gang activities, resource development, and management of crime prevention programs for all ages, from children to adults.
- F3.** Law enforcement officers, public officials, community leaders, and others stated that crime prevention programs should start with elementary-school children. However, no such programs are known to be available in local schools.
- F4.** Crime prevention programs, such as the Neighborhood Watch Program, the Citizen Academy, and the Youth Academy, that are sponsored by the Hollister Police have been discontinued due to budget cuts.
- F5.** Due to budget cuts, fewer law enforcement officers patrol our community.
- F6.** Law enforcement has noted that there are areas within our community that have higher levels of crime and gang activity.
- F7.** School Resource Officers can help build a positive relationship between children and their families and law enforcement, according to experts.

COMMENTS

Collecting Data about Local Youth Gang Activities

By collecting comprehensive data about the nature of our local gang problem, the local law enforcement agencies could provide valuable information to help plan local prevention, intervention, and suppression programs. Having such data would allow our local policymakers to make informed decisions on the efficient use of limited resources, program planning, and deciding whether or not a program is working as designed.

Data collection may be completed through interviews, surveys, police logs, and other means. For example, a gang-problem assessment protocol has been developed by the National Youth Gang Center, which has been tested in approximately 20 sites, ranging from small rural areas to large urban localities. Quantitative and qualitative data are collected to answer key questions such as:

- What, where, and when are gang crimes being committed?
- How have these changed over time?
- What are the characteristics of youth involved in gangs?
- What are the characteristics of at-risk youth?

Gang Prevention Program Director

All law enforcement agencies (including the Probation Department), mental health agencies, at-risk youth counselors, educators, and local community leaders expressed their commitment to cooperate in an effort to influence children and youth to prevent them from becoming involved in criminal street gang activity. To facilitate the development and implementation of effective prevention, intervention, and suppression

programs, ideally, a gang prevention program director position should be created. The position would be responsible for:

- overseeing the coordination of programs that would help prevent San Benito children and youth from straying into street gangs and other criminal activity, such as petty theft, drugs, alcohol, domestic violence, and driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- working with law enforcement agencies, health care practitioners, social services providers, educators, and others to create and plan programs for crime prevention, recidivism rate reduction, at-risk children identification, and other areas.
- coordinating data collection and evaluation of gang-related crime and gang activity statistics.
- collecting data on the calls-for-service to law enforcement agencies and identifying where the greatest number of calls are coming from within our community.
- maintaining regular communication with all groups involved to assess needs and reduce duplication of services.

This individual must have proper training and education in juvenile justice as well as possess years of experience working in the area of criminal street gangs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- R1.** Collect, analyze, and publicly disclose statistics about criminal street gangs, gang-related crimes, and gang activity within San Benito County (based on Finding F1).
- R2.** Assess the value of hiring an expert to oversee the data collection of gang-related crime and gang activities, resource development, and management of crime prevention programs (based on Finding F2).
- R3.** Develop and implement crime prevention programs in public elementary schools (based on Finding F3).
- R4.** Reinstate the following crime prevention programs, which are sponsored by the Hollister Police Department: Neighborhood Watch, Citizen Academy, Youth Academy, D.A.R.E., and Juvenile Impact Program (based on Finding F4).
- R5.** Hire more patrol officers in the local law enforcement agencies (based on Finding F5).
- R6.** Identify the areas within our cities and county that have the highest levels of crime and gang activity, and modify patrol patterns to strengthen the presence of law enforcement in those areas (based on Finding F6).
- R7.** Hire school resource officers at the elementary and middle school levels (based on Finding F7).

RESPONSE REQUIRED

To comply with the Penal Code, including sections 933 and 933.03 (see page viii of this document), the following affected agency (or agencies) shall respond to all relevant findings and recommendations, especially, without limitations, to the findings and/or recommendations specified below.

The following agencies shall respond to the listed recommendations:

- San Benito Board of Supervisors—R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7
- Hollister City Council—R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7
- San Juan Bautista City Council—R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7
- Alternative Education Programs, San Benito County Office of Education—R1, R2, R3, R4, R7
- Aromas-San Juan Unified School District—R1, R2, R3, R4, R7
- Bitterwater-Tully School District—R1, R2, R3, R4, R7
- Cienega School District—R1, R2, R3, R4, R7
- Hollister School District—R1, R2, R3, R4, R7
- Jefferson School District—R1, R2, R3, R4, R7
- North County School District—R1, R2, R3, R4, R7
- Panoche School District—R1, R2, R3, R4, R7
- San Benito High School District—R1, R2, R3, R4, R7
- Southside School District—R1, R2, R3, R4, R7
- Tres Pinos School District—R1, R2, R3, R4, R7
- Willow Grove School District—R1, R2, R3, R4, R7

The following agencies are requested to respond to the recommendations to the listed recommendations:

- San Benito County Sheriff's Office—R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7
- San Benito County Probation Department—R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7
- Hollister City Police—R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Documents

- 2004-05 San Benito County Grand Jury. "San Benito Gang Controls: Criminal Street Gangs of San Benito County," *2004-05 San Benito County Grand Jury Report*. [2005]. <http://www.sanbenitocountygrandjury.org>.
- Botvin, G.J., Griffin, K.W., Nichols, T.D. "Preventing Youth Violence and Delinquency through a Universal School-based Prevention Approach," *Prevention Science*, 7, 403-408.. [2006].
- Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. *The Comprehensive Community-Wide Approach to Gang Prevention, Intervention, and Suppression*. [August 2000] http://www.ncjrs.gov/html/ojjdp/summary_2000_8/comprehensive.html.
- San Benito High School District Board. "Gangs," *Board Policies and Administrative Regulations*. [December 13, 2000]. http://www.sbhsd.k12.ca.us/home/boardpolicies/board_policies_adminregulations.html.
- Weisel, D. L. "The Evolution of Street Gangs: An Examination of Form and Variation." In W. Reed and S. Decker (Eds.), *Responding to Gangs: Evaluation and Research* (pp. 25-65). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice. [2002].
- Weisheit, Ralph A., and Wells, L. Edward. "Youth Gangs in Rural America," *National Institute of Justice Journal*, 251, 2-6. [2004] www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/jr000251b.pdf.
- Youth Employment Program Council. *San Benito County Youth Services Directory*, 2nd edition. [Spring 2006]. <http://www.sbcjobs.org/>.

Newspaper Articles

- Editor. "Community policing is a must," *Hollister Free Lance*, January 10, 2003. <http://www.hollisterfreelance.com/opinion/11212-community-policing-is-a-must>.
- Editor. "Forum is a Chance to Educate Families," *Hollister Free Lance*, October 16, 2007. <http://www.hollisterfreelance.com/opinion/227417-forum-is-a-chance-to-educate-families>.
- Editor. "We Must Get to Root of Problem," *Hollister Free Lance*, January 25, 2007. <http://www.hollisterfreelance.com/opinion/204353-we-must-get-to-root-of-problem>.
- Musgrave, Erin. "Local Lawyer Hopes to Help FLY Program Soar Again," *Hollister Free Lance*, April 12, 2005. <http://www.freelancenews.com/news/153583-local-lawyer-hopes-to-help-fly-program-soar-again>.
- Myers, Danielle. "Tips to avoid being a victim of crime," *Gilroy Dispatch*, March 6, 2008. <http://www.gilroydispatch.com/lifestyles/237810-tips-to-avoid-being-a-victim-of-crime>.
- Rowland, Brett. "Police Uncover Ammo Cache in Valley View Road Raid," *Hollister Free Lance*, February 10, 2006. <http://www.hollisterfreelance.com/news/178689-police-uncover-ammo-cache-in-valley-view-road-raid>.
- Rowland, Brett. "Sheriff Stumps for Prop. 63 Money," *Hollister Free Lance*, September 15, 2005. <http://www.hollisterfreelance.com/news/168259-sheriff-stumps-for-prop.-63-money>.
- Smith, Danielle. "Violence Sparks Worry for Local Residents," *Hollister Free Lance*, December 1, 2005. <http://www.freelancenews.com/news/173768-violence-sparks-worry-for-local-residents>.
- Staff. "Child Sex Abuse Reports Rising," *Hollister Free Lance*, September 21, 2005. <http://www.hollisterfreelance.com/news/168554-child-sex-abuse-reports-rising>.
- Staff. "City Needs More Cops on the Job," *Hollister Free Lance*, March 9, 2007. <http://www.freelancenews.com/opinion/208557-city-needs-more-cops-on-the-job>.
- Staff. "Youth to be tried as adult," *Hollister Free Lance*, June 13, 2003. <http://www.hollisterfreelance.com/news/62016-youth-to-be-tried-as-adult>.
- Van Cassell, Michael. "Gang Recruiting Bill Passes," *Hollister Free Lance*, May 12, 2007. <http://www.freelancenews.com/news/214323-gang-recruiting-bill-passes>.
- Van Cassell, Michael. "Police Chief Calls for More Voices Against Gangs," *Hollister Free Lance*, June 23, 2007. <http://www.hollisterfreelance.com/news/217843-police-chief-calls-for-more-voices-against-gangs>.
- Van Cassell, Michael. "Flurry of Teen Violence to Start the Week," *Hollister Free Lance*, August 29, 2007. <http://www.freelancenews.com/news/224150-flurry-of-teen-violence-to-start-the-week>.
- Van Cassell, Michael. "Community Gang Education Forum Draws Large Crowd," *Hollister Free Lance*, October 19, 2006. <http://www.freelancenews.com/news/197514-community-gang-education-forum-draws-large-crowd>.
- Van Cassell, Michael. "Juvy Justice Commission Must Be Reinstated," *Hollister Free Lance*, February 20, 2007. <http://www.hollisterfreelance.com/news/206776-juvy-justice-commission-must-be-reinstated>.

Web sites

- Addressing Community Gang Problems," National Youth Gang Center, <http://www.iir.com/nygc/acgp> .
- Boys & Girls Clubs of America, <http://www.bgca.org> .
- Building Blocks For Youth Initiative, <http://www.buildingblocksforyouth.org> .
- California Law, <http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/calaw.html> .
- Center for Delinquency and Crime Policy Studies, California State University, Sacramento, <http://www.csus.edu/ssis/cdcps> .
- Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice, <http://cecp.air.org> .
- "Comprehensive Approach to Youth Gangs," National Youth Gang Center, <http://www.iir.com/nygc/PublicationLinks.htm> .
- Faith-Based & Community Initiatives, U.S. Office of Justice Programs, <http://www.ojjdp.ncjrs.gov/fbci/index.html> .
- "Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Gangs," Institute for Intergovernmental Research, <http://www.iir.com/nygc/faq.htm> .
- Gang Task Force Advisory Board, <http://www.hollister.ca.gov/Site/html/community/gangtask.asp> .
- "Gangs Fact Sheet," National Youth Violence Prevention, <http://www.safeyouth.org/scripts/facts/gangs.asp> .
- Juvenile Accountability Block Grants Program, <https://www.nttac.org/index.cfm?event=jabg> .
- Latino Juvenile Justice Network, <http://www.nclr.org/section//ljjn> .
- LifeSkills Training Program, <http://www.lifeskillstraining.com> .
- Lingle Directory: Alternative Programs for Children and Youth, <http://www.lingledirectory.org> .
- National Council of Juvenile Justice, <http://www.ncjj.org> .
- The National Council of La Raza, <http://www.nclr.org> .
- National Training and Assistance Center, <https://www.nttac.org> .
- National Youth Gang Center, Institute for Intergovernmental Research, <http://www.iir.com/nygc> .
- Office of Justice Programs, <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov> .
- Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, <http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org> .
- OJJDP News @ a Glance, http://www.ncjrs.gov/html/ojjdp/news_at_glance/218233/topstory.html .
- "Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative," National Training and Assistance Center, <https://www.nttac.org/index.cfm?event=safeschools> .
- San Benito High School, <http://www.sbhds.k12.ca.us> .
- Street Gangs, <http://www.streetgangs.com> .
- YMCA, <http://www.ymca.net> .
- Youth Crime Watch of America, <http://www.ycwa.org> .