

Grant Update

A Summary of Grant Activity

Governor's Crime Commission

NC Criminal Justice Analysis Center

Gang of One

Headlines from news reports continue to focus on the increasing presence of gangs in North Carolina. Recent news stories, such as "L.A. Gang Invasion"¹, discuss the growing Hispanic gang population in the Charlotte area, while News 14 Carolina reports the concerns of a West Charlotte community that children in their area are joining gangs and skipping school.² According to GangNet (a NC law enforcement gang intelligence database) there are currently 157 separate gangs with 1,503 reported and validated gang members, 178 suspected gang members and 244 gang associates in Charlotte and Mecklenburg County.

The Problem

The increase in gangs has a negative impact on Charlotte and Mecklenburg County. During the 2004 fiscal year, juvenile gang-related crime in the area increased by 42 percent, while other gang related crimes increased by 23 percent. Approximately 37 percent of reported gang members are under the age of 18. A report released by the U.S. Attorney General's office in April 2008 lists Charlotte as one of three areas across the nation where suburban gangs pose a serious threat to the security and safety of Charlotte/Mecklenburg neighborhoods. The report states "Charlotte-based gangs, particularly Hispanic gangs, have increased in number, sophistication, organization and mobility. Gangs in the Charlotte area have become more criminally active and have expanded their connections with other organized crime entities, including major drug trafficking organizations."³

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department (CMPD) formed a Gang Intelligence Unit in August of 2003 in an effort to reduce gang related crime. One of the responses is the Gang of One pilot project, which was implemented in February 2004.

The Grant

Gang of One was put into action in the Eastway Division of CMPD to provide gang resistance resources for area youth and to educate the community about gangs and gang activity through the Charlotte Mecklenburg Police Department. The goal of the program is to reduce gang crime and violence in communities targeted by the Project Safe Neighborhoods⁴ initiative by focusing on prevention, intervention and suppression of gangs and gang activity. Gang of One's mission is: "To prevent youth from joining a gang, support youth being pressured to join a gang, and assist youth in getting out of a gang." It encompasses several programs designed to address youth at different age levels by providing them with information on the repercussions of being in or involved with a gang.

A gang hotline was set up to take calls relating to youth in gangs, youth at risk for joining a gang, gang education, reporting gang threats, information on gang activity and other related information. Staff members are able to refer callers to resources



Gang of One was implemented in Charlotte in an effort to curb the growth of gangs in the metropolitan area.



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A Charlotte-Mecklenburg police officer gives a 'Dangers Involved with Gangs' presentation to a fifth grade class in a Charlotte elementary school.

for assistance in getting out of gangs and to provide support services. The hotline is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week and is staffed by bilingual assistants who take calls, answer questions and refer people to programs or agencies as necessary.

The Gang Reduction Model utilized by Gang of One addresses various levels of gang involvement. Gang prevention is dealt with on the first two levels. Primary prevention takes place in the entire population living in higher risk areas, while secondary prevention focuses on the youth who live in these areas by making them aware of the risks associated with gang involvement and providing resources to help them resist gang involvement. The third level addresses gang involved youth by intervening to help them disassociate from gangs and their activities. Suppression is the fourth and most serious level, aimed at chronic, serious offenders and gang leaders. It involves law enforcement, probation, and prosecution to remove gang members from the community. The fifth level - reentry - provides support to former gang members in returning to the community.

Goals and Objectives

The goals of Gang of One are simple and straightforward, as their mission states: to prevent and reduce the influence of gangs and gang participation. The leadership team realized that the earlier intervention occurs, the more likely it is to succeed. At the same time, they acknowledged that adults need to be made aware of the presence of gangs in the area, their activities and the detrimental influence they have on youth. The team worked to educate youth and adults to the dangers of gang activity and gang involvement by setting up training sessions to provide information to citizens about gangs, gang activity, and what they as citizens can do. Anti-gang and gang resistance programs have been established in elementary and middle schools in an effort to reach these students before they could be influenced by gang members.



Peer leaders in 'No Easy Walk' participate in a field trip to the National Whitewater Center.

Separate programs have been established to work with specific age groups. Gang education training is conducted for adults to increase their knowledge and awareness of gangs and gang activities in their area. 'Dangers Involved with Gangs' (DIG), the brainchild of a CMPD officer, is directed toward fifth grade students to help them resist the pressure to join a gang. For middle school students, 'No Easy Walk' (NEW) seeks to reduce out-of-school suspensions and improve grades through leadership training. Another facet of the program, Truancy/Safe Neighborhoods utilizes a team approach through the joint efforts of truancy officers, Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools and school social workers to identify juvenile gang members and reduce truancy in targeted areas.

Community Involvement

A variety of organizations provide support to Gang of One by offering after school programs and mentoring for youth. These include Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater Charlotte, the YWCA and the YMCA, Big Brother/Big Sisters, Boy Scouts, Mecklenburg County Parks and Recreation, the Charlotte Boxing Academy, and the Police Athletic League, as well as the officers of CMPD who speak to students in area schools. The University of North Carolina at Charlotte provides assessment of the program. Other agencies provide job placement for youth

looking for employment. United Family Services and Parent Stress Line offers support and information to parents.

Accomplishments

The Gang of One hotline received 461 phone calls during the 2007 grant cycle. These calls included 109 reports of youth in a gang, 95 youth at risk, 124 educational calls, 103 information calls, 10 reporting a threat by a gang, 19 tips on gangs or gang activity and one miscellaneous call. Since being implemented in February 2004, the hotline has received over 2,000 phone calls. Of the cases opened, 1,478 have been closed. The majority of the calls (648) were to report youth in a gang.



Trust building exercises are part of peer leader training in the No Easy Walk program.

Since 2004, Gang of One has extended its network and contacts in the Charlotte community. During the 2007 grant cycle, they have conducted 126 presentations on gangs and gang resistance, reaching almost 4,000 participants in schools and educational groups, government organizations, community agencies and faith-based groups. In the coming year, Gang of One school programs will expand to other CMPD divisions throughout the county. DIG will be presented in 35 schools, up from 23 this year. NEW was held in two schools last year; next year, it will be in five. The truancy program, currently supported in two divisions, will be expanded to two additional divisions covering 15 schools. Pilot programs established by Gang of One are being replicated in other parts of the metropolitan area.

Summary

Gang of One seeks to disrupt the cycle of youth joining gangs by stepping in before they become involved in gangs and by educating adults to the signs of gang involvement. As the director, Fran Cook, states, “When a child is six to 10 years old, they’re familiar with gangs and can name them. When they’re 10 to 11 years old, they’re making decisions to join them. By 14 to 16 years, they are (typically) either in (a gang) or they are out.” She added “We’ve got a great opportunity as a community to intervene before they (gangs) have more power and control.”⁵

By reaching out to youth before they become actively involved in gang activity, Gang of One is able to intervene and give the youth of Charlotte the tools they need to say no to gangs.

Notes

- ¹ Grantham, Molly (Executive Producer) (2008, October 30) Special Report: L.A. Gang Invasion. [Television Broadcast]. Charlotte, NC (CBS)
- ² Waliga, Heather (Executive Producer) (2008, September 16) Truancy, Vandalism Concern Residents. [Television Broadcast] Charlotte, NC (Time Warner Cable)
- ³ Attorney General’s Report to Congress on the Growth of Violent Street Gangs in Suburban Areas, April 2008.
- ⁴ Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) was implemented in 2001 through the U.S. Attorney General’s Office to provide a comprehensive, strategic approach to reducing gun crime in America. By linking together federal, state, and local law enforcement, prosecutors, and community leaders, PSN provides a multifaceted approach to deterring and punishing gun crime.
- ⁵ Dykema, A., (2008, June 20-26) “One Goal: Stop Gangs”, Charlotte Weekly, pp. 20, 21-22.



well, officer, its been along time ... im not writing to snitch on anyone or give up anything just to tell you thank you for motivating me to do the right thing. i have relocated. im no longer in touch with l.d.n.[Latin Dragon Nation] i have really tried to get my life back on the right track...

— Text of an Email to a Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Officer from a Gang of One Participant and Former Gang Member

Gang of One

GRANT SUMMARY

Grant: Gang of One

Area Served: Charlotte and Mecklenburg County

Implementing Agency: Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department

Project Director: K. Frances Cook

Funding: Total: \$141,000.00 Federal Funds: \$101,000.00

Overview: Gang of One was set up to provide gang resistance resources for Charlotte area youth and to educate the community at large about gangs and gang activity in the area.

- Accomplishments:
- Gang of One facilitated 126 training sessions, with 2,281 youth and 1,704 adults participating (3,985 total). Of the adults surveyed after the training, 80 percent indicated their knowledge of gangs had increased significantly, while an additional 19 percent indicated their knowledge increased 'somewhat'. Eighty-three percent of the youth responding to the survey indicated that they could resist gangs, while 81 percent indicated that they would call or recommend a friend contact Gang of One if they needed to discuss a gang issue.
 - 2,672 fifth grade students in 23 Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools participated in Dangers Involved with Gangs (DIG). Twenty-two officers conducted 106 DIG classes in six divisions. The program will be expanding into 35 middle schools in the future.
 - 179 middle school students in two Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools participated in No Easy Walk (NEW) as peer leaders. Of those, 155 (87 percent) completed the program. There were significant decreases in out-of-school suspensions and number of days absent per student. At the same time, end-of-grade testing results and in attitudes towards social responsibility increased, as compared to a control group. Five area schools will soon be participating in NEW.
 - CMPD Truancy Officers patrolled and picked up truant students from 'achievement zone' middle schools located in PSN communities, resulting in a significant decrease in criminal activity. One division reported a 100 percent decrease in Auto Theft and an 80 percent decrease in Residential Burglary in the immediate area around the school. The program has expanded from two divisions to four divisions of the department.
 - The efforts of the CMPD Truancy Officers as part of the Intervention Team for Truancy in 'achievement zone' middle schools located in PSN communities resulted in an increase in school attendance.
 - CMPD Truancy Officers identified juvenile gang members and associates in targeted PSN communities, resulting in 69 Gang of One referrals.
 - A total of 461 calls were received through the gang hotline during the grant cycle. Since its inception, the hotline has received over 2,000 calls.