Commission on Gang Prevention and Intervention Listening Tour

Since November 2006, over 100 people in a variety of venues have shared their concerns, opinions and ideas on how to impact the gang problem in the city. We have listed these venues at the end of this document. The following is a qualitative summary of those conversations with the Commission on Gang Prevention and Intervention. Conversations were with parents, teachers, young people, old and young gang members as well as service providers and law enforcement. This is an anecdotal summary. Along with a review of best practices and further community input, this will inform the Commission's Action Planning.

Summary of General points:
- Community members felt:
  - Gang involvement can often start at a young age. Middle school kids whose brothers are hardcore gang members or who are intimidated into fitting in with others, start wearing the clothes, and throwing the signs at 9 and 10 years of age.
  - Gangs commit crimes and live all over the City.
  - Gang violence includes bullying (that goes along with recruiting and intimidation) in schools, at parks, and on certain streets in communities as well as the drive by shootings and homicides recorded by the police.
- Victims of gang violence along with older gang members pointed out that some of the violence is instigated by females (some are gang members but some are just girlfriends of gang members) as a way to create havoc or competition within gang scene.
- Some older gang members have now moved into prostitution, pimping young girls.
- Community members were well aware that gangs were broadcasting on the Web on MySpace, YouTube and other social network web sites.

The Causes of Gang involvement
- *Lack of Family Involvement*

- o In the first Listening Tour event, youth indicated that they feel a lack of parental involvement
- o Probation officers decried the lack of parental interest and supervision of the juveniles in the probation system.
- o Community members pointed to seeing Mothers not take an interest in misbehavior and not want to set boundaries for their children
- o School administrators pointed out that parents sometimes came to school as high as their child or "tatted" out indicating family gang involvement.

- *Peer Pressure*
  - o Young people from Mira Mesa to Southeastern discussed the peer pressure to join gangs starting as early as middle school.
  - o In order to be part of the "In-scene" many youth feel the need to join gangs. It looks cool and these youth get lots of attention.
  - o In order to be protected from bullying at school or on the street, joining a gang seems easier than avoiding the situation.

- *Lack of Community Involvement*
  - o Young people don't feel connected to their communities. Isolation in Mira Mesa due to ethnic differences has made it difficult for youth to feel comfortable within their own blocks.
  - o Neighbors are fearful and keep to themselves as stories were told of gang incidents happening in the middle of a block and no one reporting the situation.
  - o Older gang members felt that the Community churches were not as involved with youth as they could be and had been and as a result youth were not connected to adults who could provide mentoring and models of more positive life styles.

- *Lack of Alternative Activities*
  - o Boredom seemed to be a thread in many of the conversations with youth. There is nothing to do was the cry. Several youth explained that gang activities were a way to fill time during the day.
  - o No safe places to just hang out. Youth do not feel safe in many of the public parks.

- o Walking home from school or going to youth facility can be dangerous because of gang affiliation.
  - *Lack of Jobs*
    - o Young adult gang members at a community forum indicated that jobs with future would be the best alternative to gangs.
    - o Young adult gang members want to start work at an earlier age – 14 instead of 16.
    - o Probation officers indicated that many of the juveniles need gainful employment in order to stay away from the gang lifestyle.
    - o Older gang members indicated that gainful employment was needed to support their families.
  - *Lack of Social Services in the Areas*
    - o Parents need support to cope with the youth who are struggling with the issue. Sometimes this is counseling and sometimes it is interventions.
    - o Parents themselves need to be in counseling for their own lack of parenting skills.
    - o Social services are not organized to meet the needs of working parents or provide services at times when most needed (after school and between the hours of 4-8p.m.)

Recommendations for Change

As stated at one meeting, whatever is being done now is not working and alternatives need to be tried. Here is a list of ideas and recommendations:

- Include youth in working on solutions and have more open forums for them to discuss issues.
- More after school programs that include sports programs, learning/tutoring programs and enrichment programs for youth.
- Library hours need to be extended for access to computers so that homework can be done.
- Park and Recreation programs need to be expanded to provide alternatives for youth.

- Teachers and Parents need to be educated about gang involvement so they can be more involved in young people's efforts to stay away from gangs.
- Parenting programs need to be instituted in all communities.
- Schools need to be safe havens not battlefields for gangs or the recruitment of gang members.
- School teachers are important models, but many seem not able to relate to at risk youth and help them get the educational support they need.
- Many young complained that school curriculum was not relevant to their lives.
- Community based resources; churches, schools and law enforcement need to talk with each other in the community to better resolve family issues within a community before they become gang issues.
- Community Policing needs to come back to San Diego.
- Ex-gang members can be resources for reaching youth involved in the gang lifestyle and helping them makes better choices.
- Mentors are crucial in a young person's life. Mentorship programs of all levels and types should be instituted.
- Public areas like parks need better security or police presence on a regular basis.
- Jobs need to come into the community. Job training is a must so that young people learn job skills and hold onto jobs. Some youth want the age to be able to work to be lower
- Many young people are filled with hate and self-loathing. Programs should be multifaceted besides building self-esteem; they should provide counseling and build social skills.
- The whole community (in Linda Vista, Mira Mesa, Mid City, and Southeastern) needs to be involved in the solutions.

Community Listening Tour:

Linda Vista Boys and Girls Club Teen Center

Mid-City CAN Latinos y Latinas en Acci**ó**n

Probation Managers Meeting

Overcoming Gangs Community Forum

Mira Mesa Youth Collaborative (UPAC)

OG (Old Gang Member) meeting

Victims of Gang Violence meeting

Reality Changers

Southeast Coalition

Black Men United

CHOICE Program

Jacobs Center for Neighborhood Innovation

Commission/SDOP Dialogue

San Diego Unified Teachers and Principals