

# FINAL REPORT OF THE 2010 LISTENING TOUR

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For the

SAN DIEGO COMMISSION ON GANG  
PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Listening Tour is a collaborative research activity undertaken by the San Diego Commission on Gang Prevention and Intervention and the Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies with the purpose of informing the Commission on key gang trends and anti-gang research on an ongoing basis.

The 2010 Listening Tour met with 120 participants who attended meetings in Logan, City Heights, Clairemont, Lincoln Park, San Ysidro, Golden Hill, Sherman Heights and East Mesa to express their ideas and concerns around gangs.

The key findings of the Tour are below, yet it is worth noting that aside from merely gathering data, the Listening Tour provided a space for dispelling myths and engaging in dialogue with people and organizations that had not met before, and also as an information sharing mechanism about activities happening in communities around San Diego County.

The Listening Tour meetings were attended by Commissioners, they provided a unique opportunity for communities to engage with key leadership figures in the City of San Diego. In several cases, collaborative community projects began to develop as an outgrowth of the Tour dialogues.

**MOTIVATIONS FOR GANG MEMBERSHIP in San Diego:** According to 39 individuals either formerly or currently members of a gang, a mix of factors contributes to gang membership including

- Poor family environment
- Desire for social acceptance & belonging
- Economic gain
- Lack of free-time activities, linked to thrill-seeking behavior by young people
- Dangerous neighborhoods with drugs and alcohol highly available, and high prevalence of violence
- Positive image of gang members
- Power
- Routinization

It is important to note that, contrary to popular belief, throughout the Listening Tour, social networking sites (Facebook, MySpace) were not reported to play a large role in people's decisions to join gangs.

**NEEDS IN POST-GANG LIFE:** Young men and women who were formerly gang members reported several challenges once they left the gang life. The most frequently mentioned obstacle or difficulty was discrimination by employers, law enforcement or other gang members because of physical markers (tattoos, shaved head) or criminal records. Psychological pressures included intense worry that their peers and society would always characterize and judge them based on their past; the fear of relapse; and the stress of trying to persuade children and family members to leave gangs and/or the difficulties associated with cutting ties to family members still in a gang. Many respondents also reported harassment from peers after getting out.

**CHANGES IN COMMUNITY NEEDS:** Violent crime is down in San Diego and the decline correlates with an increase in community-based prevention and intervention activities and targeted suppression strategies. Community members noted the decline in violence along with other changes in San Diego including:

- A more permissive attitude towards ex-gang members and the potentially positive impact they could have with youth at risk
- Police departments have shifted away from primarily suppression-based strategies to a more balanced approach including prevention and intervention
- Greater interaction between community organizations and law enforcement has led to new, creative programs

The two “new” needs reported by community members were 1) more free-time activity programs and multi-level intervention programs that work with youth at different stages of involvement in risky activities, and 2) stronger partnerships between schools, community-based organizations and law enforcement.

### **RESOURCES & SERVICES – “What Works”**

Other needs (listed in no particular order) reported by youth and adult residents are based on shared community perceptions of “what works.” Community members urged the Listening Tour committee as well as the Commission to encourage the implementation of the following strategies:

*Community Organization Strategies* – intervention strategies that mobilize the communities being affected by gang behavior into becoming actively involved in controlling it:

- Public Education & Awareness-Building
- Trainings & Outreach to Garner Community Involvement in Identifying Gang Members
- Building Trust Between Community Members and Public Agencies

*Social Intervention Strategies* – intervention strategies that address the psychological factors in gang-prone youth:

- Mentors & Role Models
- Programs Linking Youth to *New Social Networks*
- Drug-Alcohol Treatment Programs
- Crisis Intervention
- Multi-Systemic Family Therapy

*Opportunities Provision Strategies*, intervention strategies targeting the preconditions of gang formation and gang affiliation—poor education and unemployment, culture of violence (media) - in areas high in poverty, malnutrition, and mental illness:

- Community Centers
- Employment
- Tutoring/Education-Based Programs

Finally *Gang Suppression Strategies* – intervention strategies in the areas of law enforcement, prosecution, adjudication, intelligence gathering, and in the actual laws that target gang-related crime

- Protective Police Presence
- Collaborative Curfew Sweeps

## 1.0 Introduction: Aims of the Listening Tour

The Listening Tour is a collaborative research activity undertaken by the San Diego Commission on Gang Prevention and Intervention and the Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies with the purpose of informing the Commission of key gang trends and anti-gang research on an ongoing basis. This current report of trends allows the Commission to understand how to build on, support, and initiate up-to-date, effective strategies to address gang-related risk factors and behaviors in communities around San Diego. The Listening Tour gathered *Community Perceptions Data* – data from interviews that describes how key segments of the community are experiencing the gang phenomenon, including community members, parents, community leaders, youth, and gang members themselves. Approximately 120 participants attending meetings in Logan, City Heights, Clairemont, Lincoln Park, San Ysidro, Golden Hill, Sherman Heights and East Mesa expressed their ideas and concerns.

According to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention’s (OJJDP) Comprehensive Assessment Model, community perceptions data should be collected from the following groups: community leaders (both formal and informal), community residents, parents (including parents of gang members, if possible), agency staff members (social services, detention centers, probation, community-based agencies), and gang members themselves. The Listening Tour strived to offer a space for all of these groups to share their perspectives.

The primary reason for gathering this type of information is to determine how community members view gang activity and how they think gangs affect the community. Some of the questions developed for this type of information gathering are open-ended, and interviewers should encourage respondents to freely elaborate. These questions give respondents an opportunity to relate their own experience or beliefs about gangs and gang activity in their community.<sup>1</sup>

### Text Box I. THREE BROAD INQUIRIES “Things we were hoping to learn about”

**Motivations for Gang Membership:** What did former gang members report as their primary influences & motivations for joining a gang? In what ways does gang life “follow” or impact people (and their loved ones) after they are out?

**New needs for resources and services to address gang-related risk factors and behaviors:** Did community residents perceive the gang problem to have changed and in what ways? Do community residents believe that their community’s service needs have changed and in what ways?

**Types of resources and services that have worked/not worked and reasons for their success/failure:** How well have current gang prevention & intervention services worked? What are the protective factors in schools/communities that support youth in making good decisions? What can schools/communities do to strengthen the protective factors that support youth in making good decisions? What services are in place to support parents and in what specific ways can their outreach/impact be strengthened? What level and type of influence do social networking sites and other technology play in youth decision-making?

<sup>1</sup> Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (2009). “Comprehensive Gang Model: A Guide to Assessing Your Community’s Youth Gang Problem: p. 102

The questions developed by the San Diego Commission on Gang Prevention and Intervention for Listening Tour 2010 are listed in Appendix I, along with its three broader inquiries or “things we hoped to learn about by asking these questions” – identified by the Commission. The findings below are organized by the following three broader inquiries, described in Text Box I above.

## 2.0 Methodology

From December of 2009 through June of 2010, the research team conducted interviews in 10 locations and spoke with approximately 120 participants (see Appendix II for the complete list of organizations/meetings visited).

Only the session with current gang members<sup>2</sup> was audio-recorded and then transcribed. In all other instances, it was not possible to audio-record the meetings and notes were instead recorded manually via laptop and handwritten notes. The team did not attribute comments directly to specific individuals, but we did strive to record each comment made by an individual as a separate entry. This then enabled the research team to calculate the percentage of responses we received in response to specific questions. Due to the open, flexible and time-limited nature of these meetings, not all questions were addressed during each meeting.

The responses were organized by categories or “codes”. Codes are labels used to categorize our interview data that represent Themes, Topics, Ideas, Concepts, or Terms. Coding involves reading the meeting transcripts, and agreeing between coders on the interpretation applied. All passages that were given the same label or code have been judged by three members of the research team to be about the same topic, theme, or concept. (See Text Box II for examples.)

The research team used existing codes pulled from a review of other studies. To code Motivations for Gang Membership, Michael Carlie’s typology of push-pull factors for the formation of gangs<sup>3</sup> was used. To code for Resources and Services, Spergel and Curry’s (1993) typology of gang intervention strategies<sup>4</sup> was used.

### Text Box II – EXAMPLE OF CODING

**STEP 1: When the research team spoke with current and former gang members, we asked this question: “What led you to the gang lifestyle?” Below are two answers to this question.**

**Answer 1:** “Not having those resources. Not having nowhere to go but standing at the park and rec. All they make is parks and recs. “

**Answer 2:** “All it [gangs] is is kids going to the park and rec, and all that we are doing is standing on the corner at the park and the rec... what got us into the crime aspect of it? Maybe idle time, not having anything else to do and just following the guys who came before us, and thinking it was cool.

**STEP 2: The research team coded these responses using Carlie’s (2002) typology of Push-Pull Factors of Gang Formation. Answer 1 was coded as “Lack of Free-Time Activities”. Answer 2 was coded as “Lack of Free-Time Activities” and “Social Acceptance/Belonging”.**

**STEP 3: The research team organized the findings under *Motivations for Gang Membership* on the next page.**

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<sup>2</sup> Types of phenomena that can be coded (Adapted from Bogdan and Biklen, 1992; Strauss, 1987; Mason, 1996; and Gibbs, 2006). [http://onlineqda.hud.ac.uk/Intro\\_QDA/how\\_what\\_to\\_code.php](http://onlineqda.hud.ac.uk/Intro_QDA/how_what_to_code.php)

### 3.0 Summary of Findings

The sections below contain a summary of Listening Tour findings. Responses are categorized by themes (for illustration see Text Box 1). Three members of the research team (“Coders”) came to consensus on the themes, and many personal statements, stories and narratives as illustrated below.

#### 3.1 MOTIVATIONS FOR GANG MEMBERSHIP

Current and former gang members<sup>5</sup> spoke about their primary motivations for joining a gang. The findings contained in Table 1 are based on three meetings with 39 individuals either formerly or currently members of a gang.

“*Social Acceptance & Belonging*” and “*Economic Gain/Social Status*” were the most frequently mentioned structural factors, referred to most often by older (or former) gang members.

The younger respondents, in particular from interviews at the East Mesa Detention Facility, believed that the positive image or “*Portrayal of Gang Members*” played a large role in motivating young people to become affiliated.

Q: If you had the opportunity to sit and talk with people like you are now when you were younger, would it have mattered?

Respondent 1: We were told a lot of that stuff; you grow up hearing stories about

Table 1: Community Perceptions Data		
MOTIVATION FOR GANG MEMBERSHIP		
	Motivation	Responses
<b>Structural or Systemic/Societal Factors</b>  <i>Pervasive factors that have become built into the policies, structures and fabric of a society</i>	<b>Social Acceptance &amp; Belonging</b>	10
	<b>Mass Media/Portrayal of Gang Members</b>	4
	<b>Economic Gain/Social Status</b>	6
<b>Community or Sub-System Factors</b>  <i>Social opportunities, controls and organization characterizing neighborhoods &amp; communities</i>	<b>Lack of Free-Time Activities</b>	5
	<b>Family, Unconditional Love, Adult Role Models &amp; Discipline</b>	15
	<b>Physical Infrastructure</b>	3
	<b>Tradition/Family/History</b>	3
	<b>Fear, Lack of Security, Protection</b>	5
<b>Psychological Factors</b>  <i>Thoughts, feelings, attitudes, or other cognitive or affective characteristics that influence individual behavior</i>	<b>Routinization, Normalization</b>	3
	<b>Substance Abuse</b>	1
	<b>Excitement/Rush/Adrenaline</b>	4
	<b>Power/Overcome Powerlessness</b>	2
	<b>Self Esteem</b>	1

<sup>3</sup> Michael Carlie, 2002: Into the Abyss: A Personal Journey Into the World of Street Gangs [http://people.missouristate.edu/MichaelCarlie/what\\_I\\_learned\\_about/GANGS/WHYFORM/why\\_gangs\\_form.htm](http://people.missouristate.edu/MichaelCarlie/what_I_learned_about/GANGS/WHYFORM/why_gangs_form.htm)

<sup>4</sup> Irving A. Spergel and G. David Curry. 1993. "The National Youth Gang Survey" in Arnold Goldstein and Ronald Huff, *The Gang Intervention Handbook*. Champaign-Urbana, IL: Research Press, 1993: 361-402.

<sup>5</sup> Interviews were conducted in three separate locations, one organized by Overcoming Gangs and Beyond at an anonymous location (8 participants), and one at East Mesa Juvenile Detention Facility (14 participants), and one at San Diego County Office of Education (15 participants).

prison and it sounded cool; makes you think damn I want to go do that stuff. So exposure to people in prison might backfire.

Respondent 2: We might talk to kids and they'd take it the wrong way; look at our tattoos and think we're all tough; we'll tell him what we've been through and they'll get excited about it; take it the wrong way.

The most often mentioned factor **overall** was “*Family, Unconditional Love, Adult Role Models, Discipline.*” The young people interviewed at East Mesa Juvenile Detention Facility emphasized this factor in particular. When asked, “What are the good things about gangs?” the overwhelming and immediate response was “love,” followed by examples and stories of homies demonstrating loyalty, protection and brotherhood through behaviors and actions.

“They take care of you.”

“Sometimes people call you out to a park and when you get there, there’s a big party for you.”

“They help your family out when you’re not around; help take groceries up the stairs for your grandma.”

“Love means protection , through the deeds they do to you - so love is an action, they SHOW it to you they don’t tell you.”

“Let’s say you need money to pay the rent, you talk to ‘em, they don’t HAVE to give you money sometimes your real family don’t give you money; but when you got homies they bring the money; they’ll put their life on the line for you.”

“We did car washes for homies that were fighting big cases.”

The root problem, according to one former gang member interviewed at the San Diego County Office of Education is a poor or lacking family life that causes “children [to] look *outside* the home to be accepted and acknowledged” and to fill “whatever that void is”. That void, according to another former gang member who now works with youth at risk, stems from a combination of factors: “Some of those kids were bullied, they had low self esteem, no father figure, lots of missing elements.”

The second most-often mentioned Community-Level Factors were “*Lack of Free-Time Activities*” and “*Fear/Lack of Security/Protection.*” “*Lack of Free-Time Activities*” included statements about the dearth of engaging and exciting activities for young people in poor neighborhoods, and the view that ‘having idle time’ was a push factor toward gangs. This correlates with the most often mentioned Psychological Factor “*Excitement/Rush/ Adrenaline*”; young respondents (under 25 approximately) were more likely to describe a generalized desire for danger and exhilaration as a motivation for joining a gang.<sup>6</sup> Young respondents reported liking the danger of criminality and the even the risk of death.

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<sup>6</sup> Note that the desire for exhilaration is a normal human trait, but it’s more pronounced in environments where people experience boredom, motivating them to increase arousal by seeking out stimulating experiences. Dubbed Arousal Theory by psychologists, the tendency to seek out novel and exciting experiences in boredom-inducing environments has been observed not only in humans (Berlyne 1960; 1971), but monkeys, rats, cats and dogs as well (Harlow, 1954; Butler and Harlow 1954).

Why would you spend 200 bucks on skydiving when you can jack a car? When you're doing something where you think you're going to die, it's more of a rush.

What attracted me when I was little; that's where everything was at; cars, people hustling, there was just something about it that attracted me to it; where everything was at, what everything was going on, not shooting, causing trouble, just excitement.

Respondents spoke to *"Fear/Lack of Security/Protection"* with stories about the general insecurity of neighborhoods, and the danger of the gang lifestyle. Concerns over *"Physical Infrastructure"* (3) included existing neighborhood parks taken over (or fought over) by gangs, and the availability of drugs and alcohol.

Drugs don't stop, they are everywhere. The government is legalizing the drugs. The law legalized drugs. Why do they put liquor stores in the ghetto? ... There are 100 liquor stores in the vicinity here. Why? Just imagine if they shut down liquor stores and they closed park and recs. Imagine how much cooler it would be in these streets. Everybody would have a sense of thinking.

Respondents also described *"Tradition and Family History"* as a pull factor for gang membership. "A lot of people had family members in gangs, and that's all they know; that's how they came up."

All the community level factors – lack of social opportunities, social controls and organization – are interlinked. When youth respondents at Reality Changers were asked about what they liked best about school, one responded "to get away from drug dealers, flying helicopters, dead bodies, and the bad community." The physical and emotional stress of such environments contributes to the formation of "irreplaceable" social bonds within 'gangs as families.' As one young person at another interview put it "With the gangs you got the homies that love you and you doing the fast money thing, and all the pleasure stuff; and plus let's say you're walking out the rec center and get jumped, your homies will jump on it but not the coach at the rec center." Listening to these responses, one of the session's facilitators drew a parallel between gang members and soldiers in an army, comparing the dangerous street-environments and dangerous battlefield environment.

Facilitator: For you living in the community is like a battlefield?

R1. Yes. Anywhere you go. Gunfights, helicopters all the time. (Lots of nodding heads.)

Facilitator: The gang and the army thing is the same. You trust the guys you with 24-7 on the battlefield; your life is in their hands, so it's like "You better watch my back dawg."

R1. Yeah it is.

R2: It's trust.

Intense psychological bonding within gangs, as within army units, is facilitated by the presence of danger – potential or actual physical threat (including risk of death) along with large amounts of time spent together. Both combat soldiers and gang members describe the bond as "love".<sup>7</sup> Respondents

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<sup>7</sup> Field Manual No. 22-51: Leaders' Manual for Combat Stress Control: Booklet 1. Chapter 3: Positive Combat Stress Behaviors. Headquarters, Department of the Army, Washington, DC

also identified “*Power*” and “*Routinization*” (the gang lifestyle becoming a normal way of life over time) as psychological motivations.

### 3.2 NEEDS IN POST-GANG LIFE

When asked what they needed to successfully move away from the gang life, young men and women respondents described the challenges and obstacles they currently face as former gang members. The most frequently mentioned obstacle or difficulty was discrimination by employers, law enforcement or other gang members because of physical markers (tattoos, shaved head) or criminal records.

An obstacle is my criminal background, always have to be explaining myself and all of it is juvenile. Why can't they cut off the juvenile record? Being gang-documented. When does that documentation end? If I get pulled over for a traffic stop; bring the dogs, cop car, when I've changed my life at 18.

Getting back into society from drugs, violence, penitentiary. Getting back into society alone, and also work. If you don't have that background and you can't get a job. And I'm worried that my history doesn't leave; cops can mistreat me and I can't say anything.

Now that I've changed my life and have kids I worry because of my tattoos that someone will trip on my tattoos. [We get] stereotyped other gang members and law enforcement because of tattoos...

The Navy doesn't want to train gang members. Gang life follows you.

Directly linked to the concerns shared above, respondents were also highly worried that their peers and society would always characterize and judge them based on their past, rather than on the positive directions they had chosen. “My greatest fear is being recognized and remembered for my past, but not my life right now” one respondent shared. A similar pressure on respondents was the fear of relapse.

I'm afraid of striking out. In 20 years I could goof up and bring it up like it was yesterday. I have lifetime parole. If you have 2 strikes and do something wrong, you're going away forever.

I'm afraid I'm gonna go nuts. Everything you see on the streets goes in your head like a computer. Someone looks at you at the gas station; cop in the parking light; I have to catch myself all the time. Every day I have to check myself, if I slip up I'm through. I'm capable of doing some things. Me slipping up and the tattoos – that's my biggest concern.

Some respondents were fearful that they wouldn't be able to persuade their children and family members to leave the gang lifestyle. "How was I gonna change my sons to try to get them out of it before they die? I lost my youngest son. How would I stop my family members from taking that negative path?" They also reported harassment from peers after getting out and the difficulties associated with cutting ties to family members still in a gang.

Respondent 1: When I got out most likely I was getting back into the neighborhoods at my grandmother's house [around these] dinosaurs who never leave the hood and they know you're out of prison and that you have a couple hundred bucks and they're right outside whistling at you the next day. If you know what's happening in prison, then you know they're trying to drop out of the gangs but when they get back into society there's no job, no support system...

Respondent 2: I wanted to mention something. The obstacles I faced – I go back to the hood all the time, every day, and I still see old homies. I try to look the other way. When they see you and they know you've haven't been around for a long time. So you're like what do I do? You use all your excuses with them – my uncle was dying every week. I was sick and tired. I figured if I could take a beating from a rival gang member, I could take a beating from my homies.

Respondent 3: My brothers involvement in the gang can pull me a little towards the street way, have to cut ties with my brother. That's an obstacle – my kids look up to him as an uncle; it's hard for me to cut my brother off...

<b>Table 2: Community Perceptions Data</b>
<b>OBSTACLES/DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED IN POST-GANG LIFE</b>
Discrimination by employers, law enforcement and other gang members because of tattoos/bald head/rap sheet
Fear of being judged for the past/ Not accepted back into society
Fear of Relapse
Not being respected
Fear that family members will follow the same path
Difficulty of cutting ties to family members still in gangs
Financial Security
Harassment from peers

### 3.3 RESOURCES & SERVICES

Gang violence in San Diego began to decrease in 2008. End of year statistics showed the following trends:

- Gang Homicide decreased 25%
- Attempted homicides decreased 6%,
- Beatings & assaults increased by 17%,
- Shootings at occupied dwellings increased 61 %, and
- Shootings in general decreased 27%, and drive-by shootings decreased 42%

The decline correlated with an increase in community-based prevention and intervention activities and targeted suppression strategies. During a Listening Tour meeting in Sherman Heights, San

Diego Chief of Police and Commission member William Lansdowne noted that crime rates from 2009 are “the lowest we have seen” and the decrease has occurred in spite of the \$33 million budget cut and 230 vacancies in the police department overall. Instead, Lansdowne cited the Collaborative Curfew Sweeps at its associated Diversion Program: “Rather than having youth go to juvenile hall, the youth go to a non-profit and offer community service.” The *2011 Strategic Action Plan of the City of San Diego Commission on Gang Prevention and Intervention* further elaborated on the suspected impact of broad community-level programming.

The decrease in gang related violence is the result of not only the San Diego Police’s aggressive suppression efforts - as in the investigation called Red Sky which netted 93 gang members – as but the efforts of the community and their involvement with the twice monthly collaborative curfew sweeps; the extended of hours on Fridays at three recreation centers – Mountain View, Southcrest and Memorial (funded by the CALgrip grant); Project Safeway which monitors 15 corners in Southeastern San Diego; the Hire A Youth Summer program which gave jobs to 3,000 youth county wide. Ongoing programs which enhanced these strategies included programs at the Jackie Robinson YMCA, the Encanto Boys and Girls Club, Mentoring programs at Gompers (Metro United) and O’Farrell (Social Advocates for Youth), Inner City Youth, and Overcoming Gangs & Beyond.

Respondents also noted changes in both the gang phenomenon and community needs. Some respondents talked about a shift in “community sentiment” over the past decade towards becoming more accepting of ex-gang members and the positive impact they could have with youth at risk.

Ten years ago, the community sentiment was different than what it is today. Ten years ago I was an at-risk youth, maybe what others would call a gang member. We took an active step to say, “We are not gang members, we are active youth in this community.” And we stepped up and said we were not going to be criminalized. We were educated homeboys and homegirls. We were isolated from the center and from the schools. At that time people had a very strong anti-gang sentiment. They saw us come back and they saw us as adult gang members (I was a paralegal, one guy was a contractor, one was married to an attorney). We didn’t get support from the center or from the schools. Things are different now. ..The principal at Sherman Elementary is now very supportive...We have a good partnership.

Other changes noted by community residents included the following:

- Police departments have shifted from primarily suppression-based strategies to a more balanced approach including prevention and intervention.
  - Example: The Escondido Police Department’s Gang Investigations Unit (established in June 2006) has shifted its focus from just catching and arresting the suspects in gang crimes to including intervention and prevention. A primary example is the formation of the Family Intervention Team (FIT), organized by Sgt Mike Kearney (director of the Gang Investigations Unit), whose members include faith-based groups, schools and other resource organizations, and runs bi-weekly meetings and excursions for at risk kids who are referred to the group by schools and parents.

- Greater interaction between community organizations and law enforcement has led to new, creative programs. For example, after it was suggested at a community meeting, the San Diego Police Department launched a program to remove documentation for minors whose parents vouch that they are no longer in a gang.
- The communities identified two specific needs:
  - more programs for working with youth “who are in the records as identified gang members,” and
  - stronger partnerships to facilitate more free-time activity programs and multi-level intervention programs for working with youth at different stages of involvement in risky activities.

### Text Box II – Programs

Free-Time Activities: Karate, Mobile Libraries, Recreation Centers, Parks and Open Spaces, Teen Clubs, Activities for Middle-School youth.

We need more programs. Five to seven years ago there were programs like karate, they were not expensive, \$7-10. We have no library here. [We need] programs to keep them out of the street. They have nothing to do.

Bring programs for the kids; sports – the spaces across the street are locked. The kids are playing there because they jump the fence. What do the teenagers do when the parents are at work? The kids hang out on the corners. Now we have businesses that are being broken into. It is being blamed on the gang members, but we need to bring programs to the kids.

Several times, while discussing needing more programs, community members requested greater funding. However, Commissioners tended to point out that strategic partnerships organized from the “ground up” by community leaders – not “top-down” initiatives organized and funded by City administrators – had resulted in better programming in some communities.

The churches in other communities have stepped up to the plate because there is a lack of funding. We have a principal who is responsible for the curfew sweeps. There are three churches that are involved with the sweeps. Because of their ministries they have stepped up to help PD with the diversion programs. That is something that you may want to look at. It is really about building relationships within the community.<sup>8</sup>

Second, community members reported the need for better communication, relationships and formal partnerships between organizations. The primary change reported by community members was a need for greater participation and more diverse partnerships inside communities.

We need to see more of that. We need to see stronger partnerships. Park and Recs need to be involved with these partnerships. Let’s start with the basics. Let’s get those gates open.”

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<sup>8</sup> Contribution made by CGPI Executive Director Lynn Sharpe-Underwood

### 3.3 “WHAT WORKS” AND “WHAT WE WANT”: REQUESTS FOR EFFECTIVE RESOURCES & SERVICES

The other needs reported by youth and adult residents are not necessarily new, but they are based on shared perceptions of “what works”. As people shared their experiences about which resources and services tended to be most effective, the conversation typically shifted towards statements of ‘need’; for example “Community centers are really important and we need more of them.” This section is organized by Spergel and Curry’s typology of intervention strategies, and describes strategies that are both perceived to “work” and that community members would like to see more of.

**COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION:** *Intervention strategies that mobilize the communities being affected by gang behavior into becoming actively involved in controlling it.*

- **PUBLIC EDUCATION & AWARENESS-BUILDING:** CGPI is credited for having raised the profile of gangs and community empowerment to prevent youth violence in San Diego communities.
- **TRAININGS & OUTREACH TO ENLIST SUPPORT & COOPERATION OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS IN IDENTIFYING GANG MEMBERS:** Community members (and law enforcement) believed that jointly conducted trainings between police department and community organizations (churches, YMCAs, Boys and Girls Club, etc) would be highly effective.
- **BUILDING TRUST BETWEEN COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND PUBLIC AGENCIES** (e.g. citizens and police): CGPI was credited for helping to build positive relationships and better coordination between public agencies and the community. Respondents viewed Community Policing, Curfew Sweeps, and Parent Trainings (to identify problem behaviors in children) as highly effective coordinated interventions.

**SOCIAL INTERVENTION:** *Intervention strategies address the psychological factors in gang-prone youth, and include a wide range of psychosocial interventions*

- **MENTORS & ROLE MODELS:** Youth who were interviewed demonstrated a clear consensus on the importance of mentoring, both to keep young people away from gangs and to help them transition out of them. When asked “why mentoring works”, youth reported two causal mechanisms: (1) By involving youth in community activities, the mentoring programs help young people to feel useful, valued, connected to – **and accountable to** – others in their community, and (2) The motivational strategies mentors use (‘pushing’ youth to work hard) helped young people in developing healthy self-esteem, focus on the future, and sense of accomplishment.
- **PROGRAMS THAT LINK YOUTH TO NEW SOCIAL NETWORKS** (new people, voices, and ideas). These programs can operate in Communities (i.e. Overcoming Gangs, Turning Hearts), Schools, or Prison/Detention Facilities (i.e. JOLT). Former gang members viewed this category of program as highly important.

- **DRUG-ALCOHOL TREATMENT PROGRAMS:** Substance abuse treatment programs are designed to help addicts, alcoholics, chronic relapse victims, and their families find effective treatment and intervention for alcoholism and addiction of the highest quality. According to the people interviewed, programs with a spiritual or religious component were particularly effective.
- **CRISIS INTERVENTION:** Gang/Violence Prevention trainings for parents and also for teachers as “the second line of defense”; Shelters for prostitutes and homeless children.
- **MULTI-SYSTEMIC FAMILY THERAPY (MST):** MST delivers home-based services to families of serious juvenile offenders, “focused on improving caregiver discipline practices, enhance family affective relations, decrease youth association with deviant peers, increase youth association with prosocial peers, improve a youth’s school or vocational performance, engage youth in prosocial recreational outlets, and develop an indigenous support network of extended family, neighbors, and friends to help caregivers achieve and maintain such changes.”<sup>9</sup>

And we have to know what’s going on in the home. What kind of environment are they going home to? These kids are victims of their own environments. They believe and think that’s who they are. [We need to] start speaking life into these kids and the preventive part is educating the parents and strengthening the relationships in those families.

**OPPORTUNITIES PROVISION:** *Intervention strategies targeting the preconditions of gang formation and gang affiliation—poor education and unemployment, culture of violence (media) - in areas high in poverty, malnutrition, and mental illness.*

- **COMMUNITY CENTERS:** In every interview where community members were asked what communities needed more of to keep young people safe and out of trouble, people responded that community centers “with amenities” were important. Young people reported that “after-school programs” and “staying busy” made them feel safe. A former gang member interviewed at East Mesa suggested community recreation centers with “a greater diversity of activities for kids – hockey, cricket, water polo, rugby”. Another suggested teen clubs, and activity clubs targeting middle-school. “Let’s close the parks and recs and let’s make community centers” another respondent offered; another asked for “Community Centers NOT Parks and Recs, that have music studios, computer labs, arts and crafts, fashion design, art gallery design, cooking classes, swimming pools, even ballroom dancing. It should be free with no charge for entry, just the community helping

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<sup>9</sup> MultiSystemic Family Therapy Services. Online resource: [http://www.mstservices.com/executive\\_summary.php](http://www.mstservices.com/executive_summary.php)

the youth prosper.” Other suggestions – “More Boys and Girls Clubs”; YMCA upgrades; Friday night activities for teens.

- **EMPLOYMENT:** Employment programs were also mentioned in almost every session, particularly by adult community members and ex-gang members. Said one community member:

There are a lot of unemployed people in this community. I know the budget is tight, but if we could invest a little bit in to the neighborhood for preventative work, it would pay off in the long run. Train people to supervise the park and recs. My kids don't have anyone to look up to, so the gang life looks attractive. It is the best they have to look at.

Suggestions included job development and placement, micro-credit loans, job fairs, employers willing to “employ past felons; individuals with jackets”; and community development policies that encourage hiring low income individuals. One respondent shared the following story:

There is a program in Massachusetts where all of the public work programs are tiered with low-income individuals. In spite of the Union's requirements, there is a requirement to hire individuals in their community who are working on public help programs. That has a profound effect on people who live in a certain geographical area. We need to broaden the definition of economic development to include people, not just profits for corporations... Make sure any economic development within a community have the people prioritized.

- **TUTORING/EDUCATION-BASED PROGRAMS:** Finally, young people emphasized school-based assistance and tutoring, particularly programs where they felt the culture was positive (“they don't talk to us about statistics of failure”), encouraging and affirming, where prejudice and discrimination were both acknowledged and discouraged through a culture of tolerance, where they feel teachers “want to be there”. Young people also mentioned often their view of school as a sanctuary, a place of freedom and learning; everyone could describe something about school that they really liked/connected with. Several people expressed a desire for courses on emotional intelligence (i.e. anger management), violence prevention, and conflict resolution.

**GANG SUPPRESSION:** *Intervention strategies in the areas of law enforcement, prosecution, adjudication, intelligence gathering, and in the actual laws that target gang-related crime*

- **PROTECTIVE POLICE PRESENCE:** Respondents in Sherman Heights emphasized the importance of rapid police response to 911 calls. Youth respondents in Lincoln Park emphasized police presence as a factor in feeling safe walking to and from school. Several respondents requested greater police presence in high-crime neighborhoods.

- **COLLABORATIVE CURFEW SWEEPS:** When mentioned, curfew sweeps were perceived to be effective on three levels: as an example of community-police collaboration, as a way to protect young people from violence, and as a more effective way to provide resources and guidance to youth (who can avoid court by taking a six-week “Diversion” class conducted by local community groups and faith-based organizations).

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

The Listening Tour is a regular research activity of the San Diego Commission on Gang Prevention and Intervention. Informal interview data helps the Commission understand how key segments of the community are experiencing the gang phenomenon, including community members, parents, community leaders, youth, and gang members themselves.

The Listening Tour also provided a space for dispelling myths and engaging in dialogues with people and organizations that had not met before. The Tours typically ended with the group’s expression of gratitude towards the Commission and research team for their interest in what youth and community think; young people at East Mesa were particularly vocal on this point, and asked for more dialogues in the future. The Listening Tour also served as an information sharing mechanism about activities happening in communities around the County. In at least one instance, that information catalyzed new efforts to identify community leaders, and form collaborative committees.

## Appendix I

### Question Guidelines for the Listening Tour 2010

Introduction – We are interested in learning about three general things: in neighborhood gangs; the current state of resources and services in your community; and factors supporting community health and resilience.

#### **General Community Questions:**

1. Describe the gang problem in the community – how has it changed over time?
2. What are some current resources in your community that address gang activity and what additional resources do you need?
3. What do you think has worked to help youth stay out gangs?
4. Think of a healthy, strong and resilient community. What does that look like?
  - a. How did we get there?
5. Staying with that vision of our supportive, connected and resilient community, what supports did we provide for our youth to empower them to make positive choices in life?
6. What are some of the agencies you are currently connected with?
7. What are things agencies do to help? What suggestions do you have for improving agencies outreach to parents? Has anything worked especially well in the past in making you aware of services in your community?
8. What are things schools can do to help?

#### **Former & Current Gang Member Questions:**

1. What lead you to the gang lifestyle?
2. Can you tell us the main points of how you got out of the gang lifestyle?
3. What are your biggest concerns?
4. What do you see as your biggest obstacle in overcoming challenges in your life?

5. What do you draw upon when times are tough?
6. What does success look like for you?
7. What are you most proud of in your life?
8. Growing up, how would you describe your experience in the school system?
9. What does a healthy family environment look like to you?
10. Imagine your community in 5 years. Young people are supported, involved in the community, and on the path toward success. How did we get there?
11. What are you willing to do to get involved in gang prevention?
12. What would want a Director of Community Services to know about creating programs that can reach our young people and keep them out of gangs?

**Youth Questions:**

1. Tell us about a good decision you made in your life.
2. “Looking back on those examples you just gave, what helped you make those ‘good decisions’. Are there any lessons in there for adults who want to support youth making good choices? Are there lessons for younger children?”
3. Where/How do you see yourself in 5 years?
4. What are some steps you are taking now to get there?
5. How does technology impact your choices (i.e. video games, Facebook, Myspace) of friends and things you do?
6. Describe what you like about school and your school environment that supports good choices.
7. What are some things you look forward to about school?

8. Let's imagine that you have been given money to make community healthy, safe, and resilient. What are some of the things you would do?
9. What makes you feel safe?
10. Who can you turn to for help?
11. What do you like to do?
12. What are the most important supports you have to be "the best you can be"?

Appendix II  
List of Organizations/Areas Visited

1. Youth Voice Summit (December, 2009)
2. Former Gang Members (January 13<sup>th</sup>)
3. Coalition of Neighborhood Councils/Youth Opportunity and Employment Program (February 16<sup>th</sup>)
4. Overcoming Gangs and Beyond (February 23<sup>rd</sup>)
5. Race/Human Relations (March 2<sup>nd</sup>)
6. Sherman Heights Town Council Meeting (April 7<sup>th</sup>)
7. Reality Changers (April 14<sup>th</sup>)
8. East Mesa Juvenile Detention Facility (April 20<sup>th</sup>)
9. Skyline Recreation Council (April 22<sup>nd</sup>)
10. Youth City Council (May 19<sup>th</sup>)