

# **COUNTY LAW ENFORCEMENT RESPONDS TO INCREASED GANG ACTIVITY**

## **SUMMARY**

The 2008-2009 Grand Jury undertook an investigation into gang activity in San Luis Obispo County. We learned that gang membership and activity is on the rise with gang members from outside this county contributing to the increase in gang related crime. County law enforcement agencies along with other government and community organizations are coordinating their efforts to combat this threat. The Grand Jury has recommendations it hopes the engaged agencies will pursue.

## **METHOD**

As part of our investigation the Grand Jury did the following:

- Interviewed the San Luis Obispo County Gang Task Force
- Interviewed members of the San Luis Obispo County Sheriff Department
- Interviewed members of the San Luis Obispo County District Attorney Office
- Interviewed members of the San Luis Obispo County Probation Department
- Interviewed a member of the San Luis Obispo County Probation Department's Youth in Action Program
- Interviewed an officer with the State Department of Justice Drug Task Force
- Attended a meeting of the Anti-Gang Coordinating Committee
- Reviewed the Anti-Gang Coordinating Committees Strategic Plan
- Received a presentation on the planned El Paso de Robles Re-Entry Facility

## **NARRATIVE**

The San Luis Obispo County Gang Task Force estimates there are 1200 gang members in the County. The counties surrounding San Luis Obispo have a larger number of gang members. These gangs are encroaching on our county. A prime example of this was in December of 2007 when several members of the Crips street gang traveled from Los

Angeles to San Luis Obispo to rob a bank. Due in part to the efforts of the gang task force, all of the men were arrested before they could successfully commit the crime. The District Attorney estimates his office reviewed 51 gang related cases for prosecution last year. That number has increased from 18 in 2006 to 36 in 2007. The most alarming trend in these numbers is the increase in gang related juvenile cases from three in 2006 to 19 in 2008.

The primary means of combating illegal activities has been suppression, as gang activity rises, more law enforcement personnel are needed. The San Luis Obispo County Gang Task Force was created with the goal of removing drugs, weapons and gang members from the county streets. The Gang Task Force is made up of two sheriff's deputies, two probation officers, a deputy district attorney and one clerical staff person. Of these, grant money covers partial costs of one deputy sheriff, one deputy probation officer, one deputy district attorney and the clerical staff person. Supervision is provided by a sheriff's sergeant who has responsibility for various units, including the Gang Task Force. Due to budget constraints no other police departments are able to dedicate a member to the task force. However, most of them have assigned a liaison for information sharing. The Board of Supervisors may apply for grant money available on the state and federal levels. Given the current state of the economy there is no additional money available from the county. State and federal grants may be eliminated. Law enforcement officials had to think of a new approach.

In November 2007 the Chief Probation Officer, County Sheriff and District Attorney formed the Anti-Gang Coordinating Commission (AGCC). Since the AGCC was formed approximately two dozen other county and city departments have joined the commission. The mission of the AGCC is "to reduce the magnitude, frequency and violence of gang activity in San Luis Obispo County." The commission consists of three branches; Prevention and Intervention (headed by Probation), Detection and Suppression (headed by the Sheriff) and Rehabilitation and Re-entry (headed by the District Attorney). The commission is continually searching and applying for state and federal grants. Additional grant money will afford the hiring of more officers for the gang task force and fund new

outreach programs. Along with the city and county departments, the commission hopes to involve community volunteer programs and faith-based organizations.

### **Prevention & Intervention**

Everyone involved with gang suppression recognizes the importance of reaching out to young children before the gangs do. The probation department has started the Youth in Action Program. This program works with at risk students, ages 10 to 14, in the Lucia Mar Unified School District. There are currently 39 students who meet twice a week for 90 minutes each session. The students are taught about positive values, conflict resolution, anger management, and refusal skills and are shown the impacts of belonging to a gang. The Youth in Action Program also hosts periodic meetings for parents in English and Spanish. The parents are shown how to recognize and deal with the early signs of gang involvement. Despite the importance of these meetings, not all parents attend. The members of the county gang task force and probation department recommend these meetings be made mandatory for parents of minors on probation.

Mentoring programs are important. Other programs like Big Brother Big Sisters, Boy Scouts, 4H and sports leagues help give children alternatives to spending time on the streets.

### **Detection & Suppression**

Law Enforcement officials understand the need for better communication and information sharing among all agencies. Agencies are actively participating in investigations initiated by other agencies. By sharing information all departments will have a better grasp of the problems they face. Law enforcement is also looking at ways to provide more information and education to the public about gang activities.

One of the ways gang members communicate and show their territory is with graffiti. The sheriff's Department, working in conjunction with local cities, will be presenting a graffiti removal ordinance to the Board of Supervisors to allow for the removal of graffiti on private property. The Sheriff's Department will fund a graffiti removal vehicle that

will allow for mixing of paints on location. Matching colors with the original background will avoid the eyesore of using mismatched paint. In this way graffiti may be quickly removed to avoid escalation.

### **Rehabilitation & Re-Entry**

National statistics show that 10 percent of all state parolees fail to report to parole officers after release. In California that rate is over 20 percent, which may be due in part to California's lack of an effective re-entry facility for its prisoners. [Source: California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.] The state of California has an average recidivism rate of 70% compared to 35% for states that operate a re-entry facility.

In an effort to reduce recidivism in California, Assembly Bill 900, also known as the Public Safety and Offender Rehabilitation Services Act of 2007, provides funds for the establishment of a secure community re-entry facilities in our state. Each facility will house up to 500 inmates for the last 6 - 12 months of their incarceration. A re-entry facility is planned at the former El Paso de Robles Youth Correctional Facility site operated by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. The proposed facility will provide intensive rehabilitation, and offer offender job training, mental health and substance abuse counseling, housing placement upon release, educational assistance, and other services in the critical few months just prior to their release. If the goal of reduced recidivism is achieved, California taxpayers will benefit from such re-entry facilities because of lower crime rates and lower incarceration costs. San Luis Obispo County is working hard to establish additional programs to assist parolees and probationers to successfully re-enter society Vocational, educational and apprenticeship programs for adults are planned.

The Community Action Project (formerly The Economic Opportunity Commission) operates the Liberty Tattoo Removal Program. Former gang members can have tattoos removed in exchange for 16 hours of community service work. Once the tattoos are removed it is easier for former gang members to find employment.

According to the Anti-Gang Coordinating Commission's Strategic Plan, they would like to establish the Employment Coordinator position. This person will establish the link between parolee/probationers and the programs available to them. This coordinator will work closely with the new El Paso de Robles Re-Entry Facility.

## **CONCLUSION**

With the increase in gang activity in this county and the large number of gang members in surrounding counties, officials must think of new ways to combat the threat. The members of the Anti-Gang Coordinating Commission have developed a strategic plan that does not involve additional funding from the Board of Supervisors. The commission is working to increase intervention and education programs for at risk children and their parents. It has been recommended by the gang task force that the parent education classes be made mandatory for parents with minors on probation. The goal is to get juveniles involved with positive programs before they look to gangs for their identity. The Liberty Tattoo Removal Program and new El Paso De Robles Re-Entry Facility will help former gang members re-enter society. The Board of Supervisors and other county agencies have the ability to apply for additional state and federal grant money.

## **COMMENDATIONS**

The Grand Jury commends the following:

- The Liberty Tattoo Removal Program and the Youth in Action Program for their commitment to helping dissuade gang involvement,
- The County Gang Task Force for their vigilant efforts to prevent and suppress gang activity, and
- The Anti Gang Coordinating Commission for recognizing a new approach is needed and looking at programs that do not require additional county funds.

## **FINDINGS**

1. State and federal grants for anti gang efforts are being reduced.

2. Probation officials say not all parents attend the classes provided by the Youth in Action Program. The classes could be more effective if made mandatory.
3. The County Gang Task Force believes graffiti must be removed as soon as possible to avoid escalation.
4. The Anti Gang Coordinating Commission believes the Liberty Tattoo Removal Program assists former gang members seeking employment.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. The county should continue to pursue additional grant money on the state and federal levels.
2. The Anti Gang Coordinating Commission should pursue legislation that requires parents of juveniles on probation attend educational classes.
3. County Board of Supervisors should consider enacting a graffiti removal ordinance.

## **REQUIRED RESPONSES**

Responses to the Finding are required as follows:

Findings 1, 2, and 4: The Anti Gang Coordinating Commission

Findings 1 and 3: The San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors

Responses to the Recommendations are required as follows:

Recommendations 1 and 2: The Anti Gang Coordinating Commission

Recommendations 1 and 3: The San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors

The responses from the Anti Gang Coordinating Commission shall be submitted to the Presiding Judge at the San Luis Obispo Superior court by August 3, 2009. Please provide a copy of all responses to the Grand Jury as well.

The responses from the San Luis County Board of Supervisors shall be submitted to the Presiding Judge at the San Luis Obispo Superior court by September 2, 2009. Please provide a copy of all responses to the Grand Jury as well.

The mailing addresses for delivery are:

<b>Presiding Judge</b>	<b>Grand Jury</b>
Presiding Judge Martin Tangeman Superior Court of California 1035 Palm, Room 385 San Luis Obispo, CA 93408	San Luis Obispo County Grand Jury P.O. Box 4910 San Luis Obispo, CA 93403