

**Community and Law Enforcement: Working Better Together for Our
Youth
A Collaborative Approach to Prevent Youth Violence**

by

**Trevor Iida
Salinas Police Department**

August, 2008

COMMAND COLLEGE CLASS 43

The Command College Futures Study Project is a FUTURES study of a particular emerging issue of relevance to law enforcement. Its purpose is NOT to predict the future; rather, to project a variety of possible scenarios useful for strategic planning in anticipation of the emerging landscape facing policing organizations.

This journal article was created using the futures forecasting process of Command College and its outcomes. Defining the future differs from analyzing the past, because it has not yet happened. In this article, methodologies have been used to discern useful alternatives to enhance the success of planners and leaders in their response to a range of possible future environments.

Managing the future means influencing it—creating, constraining and adapting to emerging trends and events in a way that optimizes the opportunities and minimizes the threats of relevance to the profession.

The views and conclusions expressed in the Command College Futures Project and journal article are those of the author, and are not necessarily those of the CA Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST).

Community and Law Enforcement: Working Better Together for Our Youth

A Collaborative Approach to Prevent Youth Violence

“Officer, how do I know if my child is involved in gangs and gang violence, and what can I do?” As a police officer, how many times have we heard this or similar questions? The issue of youth involvement in gangs and violent crime is a major problem. To compound matters, there are a number of organizations working towards gang and violence prevention that are not working together. Individual organizations may be doing positive work to prevent and intervene in the cycle of youth violence, but better coordination of resources and efforts can magnify the positive work and make a substantial impact to disrupt the cycle of youth violence.

Public Health Emergency

Although the number of youth related violent crimes arrests have been on the decline since 1995,¹ youth violence continues to be a major concern for the public. Even dating back to 1985, Surgeon General C. Everett Koop identified youth violence as a “public health emergency” and initiated a report on how public health care professionals could get involved. He advocated for public and private organizations, as well as communities and policy-makers, to work together to address youth violence.² In 2001, Surgeon General David Satcher released the first-ever report on youth violence supporting C. Everett Koop’s analysis that youth violence remains a “public health emergency.”³

According to the Center for Disease Control, in 2005 there were 5,686 young people between the ages of 10 and 24 murdered in the United States, an average of 16

homicides each day. In addition, there were over 720,000 young people between the ages of 10 and 24 who were treated in emergency departments sustained as a result of violence in 2006.⁴

In a Justice Institute Policy 2007 report, it reviewed the history of gangs and gang violence in three U.S. cities, one of which was Los Angeles. Over the past three decades, Los Angeles has spent billions of dollars on the elimination of gangs and gang violence. Many of their efforts have been focused on suppression tactics, such as special enforcement teams, gang sweeps, surveillance, and gang injunctions. The Justice Institute Policy reported:

“Spending on gang enforcement has far outpaced spending on prevention programs or on improved conditions in communities where gang violence takes a heavy toll. Los Angeles taxpayers have not seen a return on their massive investment over the past quarter century: law enforcement agencies report that there are now six times as many gangs and at least double the number of gang members in the region.”⁵

Suppression alone will not eliminate youth violence and it will take a coordinated effort that balances suppression, prevention, and intervention. Law enforcement leaders need to take caution in placing too many resources in the suppression realm without balancing the needs of prevention and intervention. The emerging future, if we are to effectively mitigate the destructive impact of gangs in our communities, is collaboration.

Collaborative Efforts

A 2007 report by the National League of Cities found that “Collaboration across multiple agencies and systems offers local leaders a more effective and coordinated

method of improving outcomes for disconnected youth and a more efficient way of doing business.”⁶ A multi-faceted and coordinated approach, which combines suppression, prevention, and intervention, is necessary in order to develop long-term strategies and programs to address youth violence.

Law enforcement, including police, probation, and the district attorney’s office, traditionally provide suppression services. Suppression often involves arresting and incarcerating offenders. Agencies such as the Boys and Girls Club, Big Brothers and Big Sisters, and youth sports leagues provide prevention services. Prevention programs are important because they help youth get off to a better start in life and prepare them for the future. Additionally, there are number of agencies providing intervention services, including alcohol and drug rehabilitation, anger management, tattoo removal programs, and family counseling to name a few. Intervention programs like these help those youth at-risk get the crucial services they need to turn their lives around.

To provide comprehensive services to encompass all youth and at-risk youth, law enforcement, social service agencies, the faith- and community-based organizations, education, government, and private businesses all play a critical role to provide a “wraparound” approach to address both the prevention and intervention components of youth violent crime. A “wraparound” approach is a planning process in which resources are delivered to meet the individual needs of at-risk youth and families. Services such as rehabilitation, job training, education, and recreation programs offer positive alternatives to delinquent behavior and offer a better chance of future success.

With a long history and demonstrated ability to work within the community, as demonstrated through community policing efforts, law enforcement can bring partners

together to ensure mechanisms are developed to build a sustainable network. Unlike many community-based organizations, policing has a public mandate for safety, and a continuity of service that serves as a natural foundation to lead a prevention and intervention network that will ensure stability and long-term commitment to the effort.

Law enforcement's around the clock availability and daily interactions with the community also make this a good fit. They are often the first point of contact for many youth and families throughout the course of work at all times of the day. Officers routinely contact the same youth in the street repeatedly, or contact members of the same family. As a result, they are in a great position to understand the individual needs of the youth and family and can connect them to necessary resources. There are even law enforcement agencies that have developed cross-network collaborative systems to address concerns of youth violence.

One such system is the Strategic Home Intervention and Early Leadership Development (SHIELD) program in Westminster, CA. During the normal course of duty Westminster officers identify youth likely to become involved in violent crime and ensure they are provided with social services that meet their individual needs. During the first year of operation, 43 randomly selected youth were tracked. 60 percent of those tracked were connected with community resources, 26 percent had moved from the area, and 14 percent of the youth did not receive services because the parents refused to cooperate.⁷

Experiences such as these, and the sustained work to protect communities and link resources, provide the police with a unique opportunity; to forge those links and create relationships that will ease the strain on communities resulting from gang violence.

In fact, there is a model to help create the collaborative approach that is field-tested and ready to serve as a blueprint for success.

A Collaborative Model

In 1987 the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) looked at communities with gang problems and programs to address gang issues throughout the country. As a result, Dr. Irving Spergel of the University of Chicago developed what has become known as the “Comprehensive Gang Model.” The Model supports the collaborative approach and identifies several key steps and strategies that many communities across the country have successfully implemented.

OJJDP has developed a simplified five-step process to implement the Comprehensive Gang Model. The five-step process includes:

1. The community and community leaders acknowledge there is a youth gang problem;
2. A community assessment is conducted to determine the nature and scope of the problem, which leads to the identification of the population and location of the greatest need for services;
3. Development of a steering committee and with the input of the community and community leaders identify goals and objectives and begin a collaborative initiative;
4. The steering committee ensures resources, such as programs and services, are available to the collaborative agencies; and

5. The steering evaluates the progress of the initiative, reassesses the youth gang problem, and makes changes to the response as necessary.⁸

We will look at the experience of a community in California and their effort to turn this concept into reality. Although gang issues in Salinas, CA, are significant, they are not that much different than we see in communities across America.

Acknowledging the problem

The first step to develop a comprehensive model is for a community and its leaders to acknowledge there is a youth gang problem. Salinas, California, an agricultural city of approximately 150,000 residents, has a history of gangs and youth violence. The Salinas Police Department estimates there are over 3,000 gang members or associate gang members in the City.⁹ In March 2007, City officials held a town hall meeting to discuss gangs and youth violence after more than 20 shootings occurred in a six-week span.¹⁰ The same day, a group of high school students and community leaders held a march and rally to protest the amount of violence and call for action. Salinas Mayor Dennis Donohue said, “(Residents) are showing they’re ready to really engage and join in preventative methods to address the problem.”⁹ Both Salinas City officials and the community wanted to energize Salinas’ efforts to develop a collaboration addressing gang and youth violence.

Community assessment

The next step in the comprehensive model is to bring community stakeholders and leaders together in order to assess the nature and scope of the problem. In Salinas, City officials took advantage of the momentum generated by community members and over a

six-month span participated in over a dozen community meetings. These meetings, held in different locations throughout the city, allowed a cross-section of community members with different perspectives to assess the gang and youth violence problem. Community members identified lack of activities and jobs for youth as major contributors to the gang and youth violence problem. In addition, three areas of priority were identified to help prevent the problems from continuing. The three areas included enhanced literacy, after-school, and family programs. The generation of dialogue and ideas helped identify goals and objectives, which is the next step of the process.

The steering committee

The identification of goals and objectives is determined by a steering committee. The steering committee should be comprised of leaders and executives from different areas of faith- and community-based organizations, education, government, and private businesses. Salinas Mayor Donohue enlisted the aid of community leaders to analyze the scope and nature of the gang and youth violence issue and, along with the community input, determine goals and objectives for the initiative. The City focused on developing a culture of literacy, street outreach to connect youth and families to resources, and job development skills for youth.

Resources allocated

The fourth step in the model is for the steering committee to provide support and resources to the collaborative agencies to complement the initiative's strategies and programs. In Salinas, funding was dedicated to develop a street outreach program, as well as a job development and job creation program for youth. In terms of literacy, the

steering committee encouraged the City to have the Salinas Library Department take the lead. The City supported the recommendation and ultimately added staffing, increased the number of hours libraries were open, and changed policies to make it easier for community members, including youth, to get library cards.

Evaluating progress

As Salinas is in the early stages of development in their comprehensive strategy, the next step will be to evaluate the strategies and programs that have been developed. The steering committee will review statistical outcomes and ensure they are consistent with the goals and objectives. If programs are not meeting outcomes, then the steering committee can make adjustments, such as re-developing the program or looking for other areas to target resources.

The Comprehensive Gang Model is a guide, and it provides communities with a starting point. Communities involved in a collaborative effort can exchange best practices, but need to be mindful of the unique needs of their own community and create strategies and programs that will be consistent with their needs.

Challenges of Collaborations

While law enforcement is naturally in good position to lead and guide a collaborative effort to spearhead prevention and intervention strategies, there are several challenges that must be addressed.

Leadership

As leaders in the community, law enforcement is in prime position to take the lead role in providing and ensuring prevention and intervention strategies are developed to provide positive, healthy alternatives to violence and gangs.

Law enforcement has the ability to hold other social service and community based organizations accountable to provide services for at-risk youth and their families in a coordinated fashion. Law enforcement is looked upon as leaders in the community because of the work they do on a daily basis with community members. Also, law enforcement is often times a first point of contact with at-risk youth and their families.

According to the Institute for Youth, Education & Families, “As collaboration partners overcome silos within and between municipal, county and state levels of government, as well as barriers with school districts and community groups, new opportunities emerge and the benefits of working together become increasingly visible.”⁶

Balance of approach

One challenge that must be overcome is an imbalanced collaborative approach, which focuses too heavily on suppression and does not provide enough focus on prevention and intervention. Suppression often means increasing staffing levels and over-time to develop short-term solutions, which are designed to prevent crime. Suppression is often the answer when communities see a spike in violent crimes. When increased patrols and overtime reduce violent crimes they are often times reduced to previous levels until the next increase or spike in violence. In the Justice Institute Policy’s 2007 report it said, “Suppression-oriented activities can provide a feeling of efficacy to law enforcement officers frustrated by their inability to rein in crime and

violence, and they create the public impression that policy makers are ‘doing something’ about crime.”⁸

Boundaries

Another challenge law enforcement will face is overcoming boundaries, which divide government agencies at the municipal level. This may be accomplished by getting buy-in from top municipal leaders, who can exert positive influence and build support for prevention and intervention strategies and programs. Too often leaders within the same municipality are competing against one another for resources, such as funding and personnel.

Eugene Bardach completed a study on collaborations and commented, “(One) major barrier to taking on the collaborative challenge is that resources (such as talented and purposive people and flexible funding) are always scarce...Agencies do not want to give up control over these resources lest their own traditional missions be compromised.”¹¹ Each agency needs to justify their own existence by identifying critical community needs and addressing them. In this case the need for prevention and intervention strategies and programs can cause confrontation and distrust among agencies and rather than having a united strategy, individual agencies will look to address the issue on an individual level rather than from a holistic approach.

Interests

Similarly, law enforcement will have to accommodate the interest of participating organizations. Once goals and strategies have been defined for an overall goal of reducing youth and gang violence in the community, individual organization will still

have their respective mission and goals to achieve that meet the needs of that specific organization. Collaborative agencies need to learn and respect that each respective agency has different perspectives, norms, and values. Working together to define common goals and cross training with one another will help to alleviate difference and build respect for one another.

Collaborative agencies working together will strengthen working relationships and foster a comprehensive approach to deal with gangs and youth violence. Collaborations following the Comprehensive Gang Model will elicit participation from all segments of the community, which will help them become accountable for positive results. Subsequently, communities can overcome the challenges that can often plague collaborations.

Conclusion

All youth should be provided with alternatives to at-risk behavior to be more productive citizens. Youth, as well as their families, need healthy and positive services that help to develop social skills in order to eliminate the dangerous at-risk behaviors.

Intervention is equally important in order to stop youth from re-offending and repeating at-risk behavior. Unless youth and families receive intervention, such as job training and education, the cycle of violence will continue in communities. Troubled youth need positive alternatives and increased education and skills in order to lead a more productive life.

The three components of the anti-violence continuum (suppression, prevention, and intervention), should not operate independently, rather they should operate together to provide a full spectrum of anti-violence services. At the heart of a successful

community endeavor to reduce youth violence it takes strong leadership in order to hold service providers together and accountable. As service providers work together in collaboration, leadership is still a key component to ensure that a service delivery system is developed and maintained in order to benefit the youth and their families. Because law enforcement is looked upon as natural leaders in the community and because they are often at the heart of dealing with at-risk youth and their families, they are in prime position to expand from providing suppression services to overseeing the entire anti-violence continuum.

¹ United States Department of Justice. (2008). Uniform crime reports. Washington, DC: Federal Bureau of Investigation.

² Little Hoover Commission. (2001). Never too early, never too late to prevent youth crime & violence. State of California.

³ United States Department of Health and Human Services. (2001). Youth violence: a report of the surgeon general. Washington DC: Office of the Surgeon General.

⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2008). Youth violence: facts at a glance. National Center for Injury Prevention and Control.

⁵ Greene, J. & Pranis, K. (2007). Gang wars, the failure of enforcement tactics and the need for effective public strategies. Justice Policy Institute, 72.

⁶ Institute for Youth, Education, and Families. (2007). Beyond city limits. Washington, DC: National League of Cities.

⁷ Wyrick, P. A. (2000, November). Law enforcement referral of at-risk youth: the SHIELD program. Juvenile Justice Bulletin, 1.

⁸ United States Department of Justice. (2008). Best practices to address community gang problems. Washington DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

⁹ Salinas Police Department. (2008). Salinas crime statistics. Salinas, CA: Author.

¹⁰ Calderon, V. (2007, March 27). Salinas march, town meeting promote peace. The Salinas Californian, Internet.

¹¹ Katzmann, G. S. (2002). Securing our children's future. Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press.