

**United States Conference of Mayors**  
**South Coast Task Force on Youth Gangs – A Regional Collaboration to Combat Youth Violence**  
Submitted by Mayor Helene Schneider, City of Santa Barbara  
April 2015

**Why the South Coast Task Force on Youth Gangs was Formed**

In response to the tragic gang related death of a 15 year-old in March 2007, and prompted by an increase in youth homicides related to gang violence, the City of Santa Barbara brought community leaders together to discuss youth violence on the South Coast. Outcomes and findings included:

- Although there were many good programs in the community serving youth and youth at risk, there were very few programs specifically targeted to youth already or likely to become involved with gang activity.
- The programs that did exist were not well known among other service providers. Also, there were challenges to developing collaborations due administrative red tape and people working in “silos”. Since removing these two barriers would maximize use of *existing resources*, these needed to become the priority moving forward.
- In Santa Barbara periods of increased youth violence have been cyclical. When the community responds to an increase in incidents with programs and funding, over time the number of incidents decreases; funding is then redirected to other priorities. Having ongoing resources and programs to assist youth with making better life choices reduces the likelihood of future spikes in youth violence. The group agreed that any effort going forward should prioritize *sustainable funding* and the *institutionalization* of the community response.
- Community leaders agreed to participate in a process to create a cohesive response to address these challenge and improve outcomes for youth involved or most at risk of being involved in gangs. The City of Santa Barbara agreed to facilitate this effort, which later became the multi-agency South Coast Task Force on Youth Gangs.

When the South Coast Task Force on Youth Gangs was formed in 2009 there were 306 unduplicated juveniles on probation with gang terms and conditions. That number declined to 203 youth in 2012, reduced again to 170 youth the following year, and in 2014 there were 117 youth on probation with gang terms and conditions – overall, a reduction of 62%.

**What is the Task Force, What Does it Do, and Who Does It?**

The City of Santa Barbara convened a yearlong effort of community meetings and discussions on youth gang issues and solutions. Believing that youth gang violence is a community problem that requires a collaborative community effort to find a solution – the South Coast Task Force on Youth Gangs (SCTFYG) was formed in 2009. As a regional approach, the SCTFYG is funded by the City of Santa Barbara, City of Goleta, City of Carpinteria and the County of Santa Barbara. The work of the SCTFYG is very specific:

- Focus on youth in or at high risk of becoming involved with youth gangs (target population).
- Advocate for comprehensive, evidence-based programs that include suppression, intervention *and* prevention.

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- Advocate for better coordination, collaboration and partnerships to maximize existing resources and enhance services.
- Secure reliable funding to support programs with proven program effectiveness or new promising programs that satisfy unmet needs.

There are four key elements to the structure of the SCTFYG. The **Leadership Council** is comprised of 42 appointed members who meet quarterly to receive status reports, identify priorities, and make decisions. The Council includes:

- Electeds and CEO/City Managers for the County of Santa Barbara and cities of Santa Barbara, Goleta and Carpinteria;
- School board members, superintendents and administrative staff representing Santa Barbara and Carpinteria school districts, the County Education Office, University of California, Santa Barbara and Santa Barbara City College;
- Santa Barbara Police Chief, Santa Barbara County Sheriff, District Attorney, County Probation Chief, and the Presiding Juvenile Judge, Superior Court;
- Representatives from local non-profits, foundations, the faith community, parents and youth.

The **Strategy Team**, or steering committee, meets monthly to discuss agency and SCTFYG activities, priorities and needs, promotes collaborative efforts and develops MOUs, and problem solves to overcome barriers to interagency collaborations. The Strategy Team includes representatives from law enforcement, school districts, probation, lead partner agencies (city organizations, non-profits), and the UCSB evaluation team.

The **Service Providers Group** promotes programs, coordination of services, collaborations, and networking between agencies providing services for the target population. The Service Provider Group is comprised of 15 community agencies who meet monthly to share information and promote collaborations. The group coordinates an annual summit for service providers who work the target population and youth at risk, drawing 100-200 people per event.

The **Task Force Coordinator** provides the administrative hub and leads the collaborative work of the SCTFYG. The Coordinator is the only paid position associated with the Task Force, and is housed within the non-profit Community Action Commission organization.

### **SCTFYG Activities to Prevent or Respond to Youth Violence in Schools and Neighborhoods**

Key components contributing to SCTFYG success include the strong coalition of government, education, non-profit and community organizations, and the focus on case management services, individualized

client specific services, evidence based practices, restorative justice practices, cross agency data sharing, reentry services, and parent support. Highlights include:

- Regional agencies secured over \$2.5 million dollars in multi-year grant funding through the California Gang Reduction, Intervention, and Prevention (CalGRIP) program through the State of California Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC). This funding supports case management and individualized specific services such as youth employment, drug and alcohol counseling, and mental health counseling, and evaluation. Over 450 youth referred by probation, law enforcement, schools and the community have been served through the Santa Barbara CalGRIP grants. Through the Carpinteria CalGRIP grants, 2,689 1<sup>st</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade students and their parents have participated in a variety of in-school services provided to prevent gang involvement..
- MOUs were developed to allow secure data sharing between law enforcement, school districts, and probation enables a more comprehensive, individualized delivery of services for the youth and their families.
- Programs and funding were secured in response to an increasing number of young women active in gang activities while female-specific services were limited or nonexistent. In 2014, 78 young women participated in this program.
- Youth job training and employment opportunities were expanded through collaborations between the City of Santa Barbara, Community Action Commission and Santa Barbara County Workforce Investment Board. This year over 60 youth will participate in this program.
- Surveys of incarcerated youth and youth in schools were conducted to determine unmet needs, service priorities, and interests; and, reports were distributed to the Leadership Council and service providers.

### **Greatest Challenges – Now and for the Future**

When the Task Force was created in 2009, the greatest challenges were a lack of services directed to youth involved in or most at risk of becoming involved with a gang poor coordination between agencies, and lack of sustainable funding for services and programs deemed effective in combating youth violence.

After six years, the SCTFYG is relieved that the number of youth on probation with gang terms and conditions has reduced 62%, from 306 to 117. However, there is much more work to do. The Task Force understands that the decline in this population is due to a number of factors, including the work of the Task Force and its partner agencies. While “silos” have been breached allowing more effective service coordination between agencies, there is a need to continually keep stakeholders focused on the communal vision for the SCTFYG.

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The greatest challenge going forward is to retain the funding for the Task Force and programs and services most effective at changing outcomes for youth most at risk of becoming involved with gang activity. This funding challenge applies to the cities of Santa Barbara, Goleta and Carpinteria and the County of Santa Barbara, as well as schools, non-profit agencies and the foundation community.

**For More Information on SCTFYG**

For more information on the South Coast Task Force on Youth Gangs, please visit the website or contact Saul Serrano, Task Force Coordinator at the information below.

**South Coast Task Force on Youth Gangs**  
**[www.YouthGangTaskForce.org](http://www.YouthGangTaskForce.org)**

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