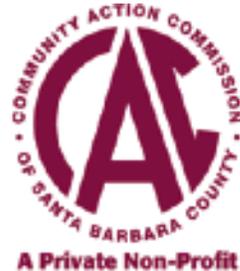


# South Coast Task Force on Youth Gangs: Los Prietos Boys Camp Survey



**As Community Members, What Can We Do to  
Help a Youngster Get out of a Gang?**

## **A Qualitative Analysis of Youth Perspectives**

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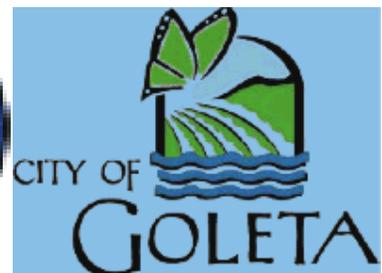
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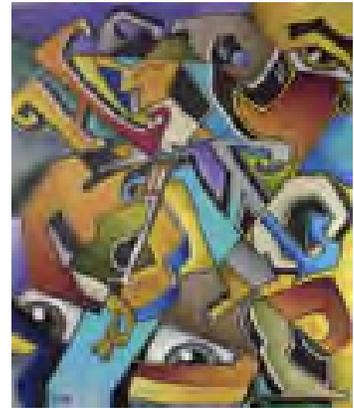
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## South Coast Task Force on Youth Gangs

The Strategy Planning Committee on Youth Violence (SPCYV) was established in January 2008 in response to Santa Barbara City Council direction to improve communication and coordination with other government agencies and non-profit organizations who are engaged with providing services and programming to local at-risk youth. In March of 2009, the South Coast Task Force on Youth Gangs (SCTFYG) was formed based upon a recommendation of the SPCYV. The SCTFYG initiated this survey and commissioned its analysis.



## The Youth

Participants were 58 juvenile boys participating in the Los Prietos Boys Camp program. The Boys Camp provides a local commitment option in a 24-hour minimum-security facility for males on probation who are between the ages of 13 and 18 years. The goal of Los Prietos is to help youths gain the skills and life experiences to become successful members of society upon release. Programs include counseling, education, vocational training, drug and alcohol programming, religious and spiritual expression, and community service.

## The Survey

1. As community leaders, what can **we** do to motivate a youngster to make the commitment to get out of his street gang?
2. As community leaders, what can we do to help a youngster secure the help of his **family members** to get out of a gang?
3. As community leaders, what can we do to secure the support of the youngster's **homeboys** to get out of a gang?
4. As community leaders, what can we do to ensure the support of the youngster's **enemies** to get out of a gang?
5. As community leaders, what can we do to secure the support of **law enforcement officers** to help the youngster get out his Gang?
6. What can teachers do to support a student who has made the commitment to get out his gang?
7. What can we do to help a youngster who has been **green-lighted** by a local gang to take the green light away and ensure his health and safety?

## The Analysis

The SCTFYG asked researchers at UCSB to conduct a qualitative examination of the responses. The anonymous surveys were given to UCSB researchers for analysis. Dr. Jill Sharkey and three graduate students analyzed youths' responses to the questions with the Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) approach (Hill et al., 1997). CQR provides a structured format for examining responses to open-ended questions requiring multiple judges to provide diverse perspectives and come to consensus on the meaning of content. Content codes are developed by team members independently and confirmed through consensus procedures. Surveys are coded multiple times to ensure that the entire code map is applied to all surveys. Ultimately, an auditor checks the analysis for its fidelity to decrease compromises that may have emerged from group dynamics.

## **The Research Team**

A total of four research members participated in the Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) process, all of whom were affiliated with the school psychology training program at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Three team members participated in coding (one faculty member and two graduate students) and one team member conducted the audit (graduate student). CQR requires providing a background on the researchers in order to disclose personal perspectives and influences on the data analysis. All team members were female, three members were White and one was Mexican American, and the ages of team members ranged from 24 to 37 years. One team member has a Ph.D. and the other three have Master's degrees in Education; all team members are trained as school psychologists.

Jill D. Sharkey has a Ph.D. in special education, disability, and risk studies and is a nationally-certified school psychologist. Dr. Sharkey has worked with youth engaged in delinquency as a behavior aide, a school psychologist, and as a consultant. Her research has focused on how schools can better engage students with emotional and behavioral challenges. Her perspective is that schools and other institutions have the ethical and legal mandate to engage all youth in positive ways to help them achieve prosocial goals regardless of individual youth's cultural diversity, emotional concerns, learning difficulties, or other environmental constraints.

Ashley Mayworm has an M.Ed. in school psychology and is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Counseling, Clinical, and School Psychology. As an undergraduate, Ms. Mayworm worked as a Child Specialist with boys engaged in delinquency and living in residential treatment centers, and worked with youths with externalizing difficulties in a camp setting. Ms. Mayworm's primary research interests include understanding the relations between schooling and youth involvement in criminal behavior. She strongly believes that schools and communities have a responsibility to promote social justice by providing all youths with the resources and opportunities to become engaged and responsible citizens. She feels this can best be promoted through comprehensive services that address youth needs in the family, school, community, and socio-political contexts.

Skye Fraser Stifel has M.Eds in special education and school psychology and is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Counseling, Clinical, and School Psychology. During her graduate training, she worked as a mental health counselor at a county middle and high school for youth at-risk, most of whom were involved or affiliated with gangs and/or part of the juvenile justice system. As a former special education teacher and a graduate student studying school psychology, Ms. Stifel's perspective includes belief in the power of education as well as the power of prevention and intervention efforts both in schools and the community. Her experience with youth in gangs has helped her see both the great challenges these children face and the great potential each child has in improving their lives. She feels that collaboration between the main forces in children's lives (family, school and community) is essential to enabling children to achieve success in life.

Nelly Rivera, M.Ed., is a school psychology intern in the Department of Counseling, Clinical, and School Psychology. Ms. Rivera grew up in South Los Angeles, CA in an area heavily populated with gangs and has many friends involved in gang activity and who are gang members. She also worked with middle school students involved in gangs during her undergraduate career at UCR as a counseling intern. Because of her background, Ms. Rivera reports she may be desensitized to certain activities that other people might find threatening (e.g., gang members hanging out on the street to me might seem nonthreatening).

# Results: Youth Recommendations (% endorsed)

## Overall Youth Recommendations

- 1. Promote future aspirations for life, school/college (50%)\* .....6
- 2. Discuss negative impact of gangs (43%).....8
- 3. Move to a different town, witness protection, change name (22%)..... 12
- 4. Ensure kids are safe/have a safe place to hang out (17%)\* ..... 13

## Family Recommendations

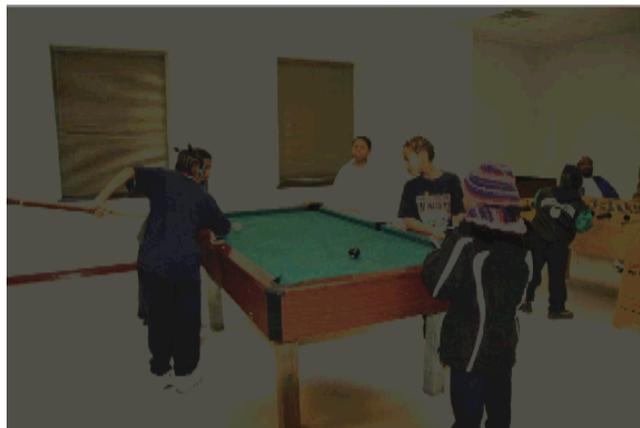
- 5. Family classes, counseling, communication (46%)\* ..... 15
- 6. Impact on your family/family is more valuable (29%)\* ..... 16
- 7. Family unconditional love, support child in getting out (25%)\* ..... 17
- 8. Family keep track of youth, take them to work, spend time with them (21%)\* ..... 18
- 9. Family members need to get out of the gang themselves (9%) ..... 18

## Community Recommendations

- 10. Keep youth busy/positive outlet for emotional release: sports or other activities (47%)\* ..... 20
- 11. Community support: youth counseling, support, drug programs (47%)\* ..... 22
- 12. Help youth get a job (28%)\* ..... 24
- 13. Give youth money, food, toys, material goods (10%)..... 25

## School Recommendations

- 14. Teachers can provide emotional/relational support (41%)\* ..... 27
- 15. Teachers should provide extra school help/assistance (24%)\* ..... 29
- 16. Teachers can help youth stay in school, graduate (22%)\* ..... 30
- 17. Teachers can make school more fun and relevant (12%)\* ..... 31
- 18. Change teacher’s attitudes towards gang members, show respect, treat same as others (10%)\* ... 33



\*These recommendations have some research evidence to support their use.

## Law Enforcement Recommendations

19. Stop harassing youth (40%)* .....	33
20. Improve relationships between law enforcement and youth (34%)* .....	35
21. Law enforcement should stay on top of what kids do (14%) .....	37

## Gang Interventions

22. Work with the whole gang together (40%)* .....	38
23. There's nothing you can do (38%) .....	41
24. Call for peace between rivals (33%)* .....	42
25. Develop friendships outside of gangs (22%) .....	44
26. You can't change enemies - they don't care about each other (14%) .....	45
27. Beat them up (6%) .....	45

## Green Lighting Recommendations

28. Move out of town (55%) .....	46
29. Cannot stop green lighting, nothing you can do about green lighting (40%) .....	48
30. Work it out/lay low (24%) .....	49
31. Fight and show you're not scared (6%) .....	50

<b>Summary</b> .....	50
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<b>Future Directions</b> .....	52
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\*These recommendations have some research evidence to support their use.

## Overall Youth Recommendations

### *Promote Future Aspirations for Life, School/College*

One of the most common ideas to help youths get out of gangs was that adults should promote positive future aspirations, including attending college, in an effort to help the youth leave gangs (50%).

#### Quotes

"Give them good thoughts of going to college."

"He is going to do something positive with his life rather than possibly die on the streets."

"Talk to his homeboys also and show them that there is a lot more beautiful things in life than gangs."

"Giving the minor positive things and help him to positive things."

"Let them talk about planning there future."

"Make the kid see how good life is with an education."

"Show the little youngster what life is all about."

"To help them by thinking of the future."

"Show them that there are other things better than gang-banging. Help them explore different possibilities."

"[Teachers] should get him into going to college."

"Motivate the kid to go to college and learn new things."

"What the teachers should do is help the student get into college and help him get into a after school program so he can get out of his hood."

"Explain to him about the good things he can have."

"Show him that if he change his life is going to be something better for him and his family."

"Show him you don't have to prove yourself and all the benefits you can obtain by not staying with his gang."

"Show the youngster positive things like how to get a job."

"Sign him/her up for college to see a better future."

“Give positive/good things what will happen if he get out. Examples-stay out of jail have a family finish school live!”

“Ask him the same things or ask do you wanna end up like the dead hommie and never come back.”

“Convince them to go to college if possible.”

“I think the best way is by putting someone in sports or by helping them graduate high school and go to college.”

“You [teachers] could help by graduate high school and keep him in school and college and make new friends.”

“By showing us there's a diferent world out there besides gangs.”

“Teachers could help the youngsters by getting them to see the other side of the life... show us the opportunities we have as youngsters.”

“Tell our family members that there is a better way for us and all we need is there support. Give us opportunities to show our family members that we could change with there help.”

“There is not much community leaders can do to secure the support of law enforcement of officers to help us because they are already trying to help us even though it doesn't feel, or look like it the are trying to help. Show us the good side of life and how it would be without gangs.”

I think leaders from the community should encourage kids to play sports and stop wasting there time in being in the streets and doing nothing. To be somebody in there life.”

"Tell them that school is more important. That education takes them farther in life than gangs do."  
[teacher]

"The law should give them much more reasons to get out of the gang."

"You should give them good reasons and prove to them they can live a better life than just violence using their enemies as their example."

"To tell them they can change there life around and can make with a better life."

"...and motivate them to go to college and help them get a career they would like to do." [teacher]

"You can offer a gang program kind of thing that gives them opportunity to go to college..."

"They can offer them opportunities like scholarships for college...maybe give them lectures and talks about how to change around and get a career."

"Educate them on the importance of school." [community leaders]

"Community leaders can show the enemies that there's more to life than going around hating others just because of their choices they've made in the past, that they can't change their past but they can change their future."

"By explaining to them 1 on 1 the options they have in life."

"It's better to let them know that they can do something better with their lives."

"They [law enforcement] should advice the youngster to do well by paying for college if their willing to get out."

"To support a youngsters homeboy you would have to have him realize there is so much more than being in a gang and life is so much more enjoyable."

## **Research Evidence**

Little, if any, research has examined the future aspirations of gang-involved youth, or the way in which the promotion of future goals impacts youth gang desistence. However, there is evidence that hope (i.e., confidence in one's ability to overcome challenges and a positive outlook) is a protective factor for the development of both internalizing and externalizing problems in children (Hagen, et al., 2005). Furthermore, Edwards and colleagues (2007) discuss the fact that in order to aid youth at-risk for school failure and other negative life outcomes one must focus on bolstering the positive aspects of the youths' life, rather than only focusing on the child's problems. This positive youth development (PYD) model suggests that promoting future aspirations, a positive outlook on life, and hope in youth may help protect against negative life outcomes.



## *Discuss Negative Impact of Gangs*

Many youth (43%) recommended that individuals, including community members, law enforcement, families, peers, and teachers, should tell youth about the negative consequences that can result from gang involvement. This included telling and showing youth where they may end up (e.g., jail) and/or trying to "scare" them out of gang life.

## **Quotes**

"Show them were they can end up if there keep doing what there doing."

"Bring up stuff that happen in the pass because fo being in a gang."

"You can tell them what happens when you join a gang and where you can end up."

"You can make them trip out and hopefully scare them."

"I would be like your enemies are going to kill you."

"To make someone get out of a gang you got to convince them and keep on telling them that something might happen to them."

"We can go to the youngsters' enemies and show them also that the streets is not the way to live and so them that when they started to bang they mostly started to get incarcerated more for gang crimes."

"It would probably be good to take him to like a program and take him to a prison to show him how life is behind bars."

"You talk to them right you might have a change by scaring them showing them what it's like."

"Tell them what waits them if they keep banging which is died or in prison"

"Help them by thinking of the way the gang life is going to take them."

"I think the best way to motivate a youngster to get out of a gang is talk to him and showing him what is going to happen with himself in the future if he keeps doing the same things."

"If they keep doing that maybe something terrible is going to happen some day."

"Teach him or her it makes your life more complicated."

"Teach them how their lives end up and be like."

"Ask him the same things or ask do you want to end up like the dead hommie and never come back."

"That do you always want to get beat up or possibly murdered/killed by your enemy."

"Take them to a tour on jail and show them what kind of lives they will have if they continue to bang."

"Tell him that you could end up dead or life in prison."

"Tell them is it worth it to be in a gang?"

"Tell them that is it worth it killing other people that are from a different block."

"By having people meet the people that have already went through the gang life that have seen murders happen that he has lost and what regrets of killing a person or being cautious 24-7 that will stay there whole life."

"By doing the same thing to all people that are involved in the gang life. Which is to somehow be able to show them first hand to where it gets you in life and how much people that it actually effects instead of them thinking that it just effects themselves which it doesn't."

"I think the law enforcement officers should show them first hand on where the gang life leads you."

"To teach there students more and more on where the gang life leads you."

"We can talk to them about how it affects your life and children's and keep in touch with their children."

"You could also show the youngsters how their life is going to be if they are still in a gang and that would be either dead or locked up."

"We could try to convince the youngster that if he doesn't get out of a gang, there will be less consequences than if he was in a gang. Also, tell him what happens to you when you are in a gang."

"We can help the youngster's homeboys by telling them exactly what we told the youngster about what the consquences will be if he doesn't get out of a gang."

"Teach him a lesson about everyone they know that are in a gang and what turned out of them and where they are right now."

"I think to tell him if he wants to go to prison for life than do what your doing but if you want to change then stop."

"Tell them that its not good to gangbang because you could lose your life."

"Tell them the same thing so they don't get hurt. And tell them to not gang bang because its not good."

"The one thing you can do is show them the life of a person that succeded in the right choices and what a bad life those have of making the wrong choices."

"Show us were this could lead all this violence of gangs."

"Talk about what can being in a street gang can do to you in the future, like dieing, hurt, getting locked up for years."

"The law should give them much more reasons to get out of the gang."

"Try and get all the homies together and take them to the local jail/YA and let them talk to ex-gang members and what they're in for."

"To show them what happen if you do get in a gang."

"You can support them telling them how ruff it is to "gang bang" and where it would lead up to."

"I think just talking to them and tell him the outcome of being a gang-member..."

"Also show them how it will be if they go to prison, like a one day trip to a federal prison so they can see what it can cause."

"To motivate a youngster to get out of a gang you would have open his eyes that gangs do not get you anywhere and only leads to death."

"You can show/and, or tell them it is not worth losing your life in a gang fight or shoot other gang members just because their in another gang..."

## **Research Evidence**

In contrast to the recommendations of Los Prietos youth, research suggests that programs that attempt to scare youth out of crime through visits to prisons and with inmates are not efficacious. Petrosino, Turpin-Petrosino, and Buehler (2005) conducted a meta-analysis of nine experimental studies that evaluated programs like Scared Straight, which take delinquent or at-risk youth to prisons/jails in an attempt to deter them from criminal behavior. Results of the meta-analysis show that youth who participated in the deterrence programs were either more likely or equally likely to criminally offend in the future when compared to no-treatment control groups.

However, despite a great deal of evidence that the scared straight type of intervention is ineffective, programs continue to exist throughout the United States (Windell & Allen, 2005). There appears to be a general societal belief that attempting to deter children out of criminal behavior by scaring them out of criminal behavior is a worthwhile endeavor. Windell and Allen (2005) suggest that one of the reasons these fear inducing inmate-youth encounter programs may not be successful is because they do not align with any theory of fear deterrence. Pratkanis and Aronson (1991; as cited in Windell & Allen, 2005) state that fear is most effective at deterring behavior when "(a) it genuinely scares people, (b) it offers a specific recommendation for overcoming the fear aroused threat, (c) the recommended action is perceived as effective for reducing the threat, and (d) the message recipient believes he or she can perform the recommended action" (p. 389). Most scared straight type programs do not provide students with recommendations for avoiding criminal behavior and youth may lack self-efficacy in their ability to resist future criminal activity.

Other Los Prietos youth recommended that individuals simply tell gang-involved youth about the bad things that can happen from gang involvement. However, focus groups conducted with criminally and/or gang-involved teenagers suggest that telling youth about the negative aspects of gang life may not actually be helpful (Chapel, Peterson, and Joseph, 1999). Participants in the study were shown seven different anti-gang advertisements and asked to share their opinions on their effectiveness. In general, the focus group members expressed sentiments that it is good to tell youth about the negative consequences of being in a gang, but that it will not actually cause youth leave their gang. The teenagers explained that "everybody already knows" the negative consequences of gangs, but become involved despite this knowledge. There appears to be no empirical evidence evaluating the effectiveness of telling gang-involved youth about the negative effects of gang life on their desistance from gangs.

## *Move to a Different Town, Witness Protection, Change Name*

One common response (22%) to many of the items regarding how to get a youth out of a gang was to have them move, go into witness protection, or change their name.

### **Quotes**

"Move out of town, go somewhere far so they can leave their gang."

"You could leave your town too."

"To get out of a gang you would have to go to a different town or state."

"You would have to leave your town but that how the gang life."

"Maybe move."

"I think community leaders can help bu having a different area to live."

"I myself would move to a safe environment were you and your family could be safe."

"The best way to secure a youngster's family is taking them to different city or placed so they could stay there and don't worry about whats is going to happened."

"Tell the police to be put in protective custody to protect your family."

"By moving to a different town."

"By moving to a different part or maybe just moving to a diffrent city."

"We can help the youngster and his family members by telling them to move or something so nothing will happen to them."

"Maybe move places to out of town, or send him to Mexico or something than he wouldnt be noticed."

"You can also move the family move to a new location..."; "You can move him out of town..."

"[law enforcement] give them new identities when they get moved out of town or even out of state so that the other gang members who don't want help don't track them down."

"You can put him in a different school or different farther areas so he doesn't get pressured by the same people."; "[Law enforcement] move the youngster with all of the other family members so that he doesn't need to be around any bad people. Or you can give them different identities so that they can change their lives around."

## Research Evidence

There is evidence that gang migration (moving gang members from one location to another) is more likely to increase than decrease gang proliferation (i.e., spreading the existence of gangs to additional communities; Maxson, 1998). Gangs used to be thought of as an urban inner-city problem; now it is clear that gangs have spread to suburban areas across the United States (Rees, 1996). Approximately one third of all communities across the United States reported experiencing gang problems in 2008 (Egley et al., 2010). Gang members who move or are moved may contribute to increased criminal activity in the new location (Maxson, 1998). In previous research, law enforcement agencies in Illinois reported that gang migration, including parents moving their children to a new town, caused additional gang problems in their communities (Knox et al., 1996). To date, research examining the impact of moving youth to get them out of gangs is limited and primarily relies on reports from law enforcement agencies. Additional study of the strategy would help clarify if gang migration has any potential as a positive intervention for youth.



### *Ensure Kids are Safe/Have a Safe Place to Hang Out*

This category describes quotes from 17% of the youth, which recommend that community members, law enforcement, teachers, and others ensure that youth are safe after leaving a gang. In addition, these quotes discussed the importance of having safe spaces for youth to hang out in their neighborhoods.

#### Quotes

"Get the youngster and his homeboys protection and make sure their safe when they get out."

"Make sure it's safe for them to get out of their gang and make sure their safe when they get out of the gang."

"Let them know they can be safe if they does decide to get out."

"I myself would move to a safe environment were you and your family could be safe."

"Tell the police to be put in protective custody to protect your family."

“Provide them with a safe place to hang out.”

“Help secure the neighborhood in which people live in.”

"Teachers should support kids in any way they can, like staying away from dangerous neighborhoods."

"[Law enforcement] Provide the youngster with protection."; "[teacher] Provide the student with a ride home."

"[Teachers] Try to keep safe from the gang he got out of."

"Teachers should watch out for a student. It's mostly a problem to a student who gets out of a gang because they got no one to count on and are always afraid of getting rushed."

## **Research Evidence**

Virtually no research has examined the process of leaving a gang for youth and the real and/or perceived threat to safety involved in this process. Of the few studies that have been conducted it is unclear whether leaving a gang will result in victimization. Vigil (1988) found that in Los Angeles it was common for gang members to be “beaten out of their gang” and the process of leaving a gang sometimes involved violence. However, more recently Decker and Lauritsen (2002) found that gangs in St. Louis often verbally abused or made threats of violence to exiting gang members, but that actual violence was very uncommon. Pyrooz and Decker (2011) found that the ex-gang members who were most likely to experience victimization were those who retained ties to the gang; ex-members who cut off all ties with the gang were less likely to be targeted.

Regardless of actual threat, there is evidence that youth perceive gang involvement to provide safety and may fear a lack of safety if they are to leave their gang. Melde, Taylor and Esbensen (2009) explored the protective function of gang membership in a sample 1,450 students from across the United States. Self-report questionnaire data indicated that youths involved in gangs reported more experiences of victimization across a three-month period than non-gang youth. However, their fear of victimization decreased during this time period. This suggests that youth perceive membership in a gang as being protective, but they actually are victimized more (Melde, Taylor, & Esbensen, 2009). Youth who live in areas with high crime rates and gang activity may feel safer once they become a member of a gang, regardless of the reality of their level of safety. Other research has supported this perception of safety, noting how at-risk girls believed gangs provided “backup”, as the gang protected its members if someone messed with them (Walker-Barnes & Mason, 2001).

Few interventions directly address the fear of violent retaliation associated with leaving a gang. One school-based program, Respect Encourages Student Participation in Empowering Communication Techniques (RESPECT; Tabish & Orell, 1996), uses school-based mediation to reduce tensions between gang members in school. The program aims to reduce gang rivalry and the anxiety associated with it in school. Such a program, coupled with a comprehensive school safety plan (Sharkey, et al., 2011), may be helpful in protecting youth who decide to leave their gang while they are in school.

## Family Recommendations

### *Family Classes, Counseling, Communication*

The youth commonly reported (46%) the importance of youth and their families getting together to communicate in order to assist youth in getting out of a gang. Specifically, family counseling and classes were repeatedly referenced as means to facilitate this process by getting the family together and/or providing the families with the tools to help the youth.

#### Quotes

"I think they should have classes with the kids and there family and see why they do what they do."

"You can tell his family to talk to them try to make them change their ways."

"I think getting the youngster and family members would be a good thing because you could talk about your life of a gangster."

"Help him show his/her family that he/she is truly committed to changing his/her life."

"Help them in supprting what they want to do and how they want to handle the situation"  
"Get [the family] together and communicate with each other."

"Have a one on one conversation with him [to help a youngster secure the help of his family members to get out of a gang."

"Sit down and talk to them."

"To secure the help of his family members you can counsel them and keep them together."

"The family needs to take a class about gang stuff so they can learn about street stuff."

"You could tell his/her mom and dad how to get him to stop hanging out with people in gangs."

"A way to secure a youngster's family members to get out of a gang is that you could help them go to some type of concling."

"Talk to the whole family and pursue him to stay away from them."

"In order to get out of gang's is by having family program, picnics..."

"Family counseling."

"I think we can help by get as a family and talk about it."

"You can have them go to family counseling."

"Family counseling."

"Community leaders can help a youngster secure the help of his family members to get out of a gang by providing helpful information on how the family can help out."

"Teaching the youngster how to communicate with people that want the best for him."

"You should have a big family meeting about your family members..."



### *Impact on Your Family/Family is More Valuable*

Almost a third of the youth (29%) responded that youth need to understand the impact of the gang life on their families in order to help them make a commitment to get out of a gang. Both direct and indirect forms of impact on the family were detailed in these responses. A portion of these responses included the importance of youth seeing their families as more valuable than gang life.

#### **Quotes**

"You can try to make them think about their family and what they go through because of them."

"Because [the enemy] is the one that's going to kill your family because he's going to take you out with family."

"They will see the pain that the family has when they get in trouble."

"To talk to him [youth] and show that a gang isn't right to be in and that his parents are more valuable."

"By helping them [youth] to realize the pain they're causing to their family."

"Make them see that...the family are also going to pay the consequences."

"Tell him what's more important: being respected by your homies or having respect for your family. Is it worth it to put your family in danger by putting yourself out there in a gang?"

"Tell him to think about it and ask him who's always truly gonna be there for them no matter what there [sic] family or homies."

"Tell them what will your family have to go through if you get killed over gang's."

"By telling him the truth and only the honest truth that no matter how much you feel your so called 'homies' are going to have your back their not. The only people that will ever be there for you are your loved ones."

"We can talk to them about how it affects your life and children's and keep in touch with their children."

"Stop gang banging and go home to their families because they need them."

"As well as [persuade] them that their family's there."

"To tell them how it hurt your family."

"Make them realize how much they can lose of family if they keep taking the same route."

"By showing them that their families are more important than their gang."

"Tell them that family is more important because they are the only ones who will be there, not their homeboy, because they come and go."

### *Family Unconditional Love, Support Child in Getting Out*

One quarter (25%) of the youth surveyed recommended that families provide youth with unconditional love and support as a means to help their children get out of gangs. Similar to the first theme in the Family Recommendations, these quotes reflected on the need for youth to know that their families care about them and want them to get out of the gangs.

#### **Quotes**

"Go to his gang and tell them to leave their son alone."

"I think is to show them love and to be there for them through good and bads."

"By helping the kid in anyway."

"By simply having the family know that no matter the situation you need to help out the daughter or son by any means necessary."

"Tell our family members that there is a better way for us and all we need is there support. Give us opportunities to show our family members that we could change with there help."

"Be helpful by telling the family to encourage the kid too. And by helping him in a good way."

"To secure the help of family members we need our families to make us realize how important it is for us not to bang."

"...and help each other out [family]."

"Make him realize that his family truly has his back."

"They should show the youngster love and compassion [family]."

"Show them how important they are to them [family]."

"...and show him more love to them [family]."

### ***Family Keep Track of Youth, Take them to Work, Spend Time with Them***

Several of the youth (21%) recommended that family members should keep track of and spend time with youth in order to help the youth get out of the gang.

#### **Quotes**

"To spend more time with his family."

"[Family members] help them out and keep on track with them."

"Mom and Dad should take them with them to work."

"[Parents] having...something to do with us all day."

"They should spend more time with his family than him being in the streets of his hood."

"To secure the help of his family members you can...keep them together."

"We can talk to them about how it affects your life and children's and keep in touch with their children."

"You should take them on fun trips and take them places where they are not in the environment of being in a gang."

"...and also spending time with the kid too and with the fam."

"You can also have family activities to help them stay busy."

### ***Family Members Need to Get out of the Gang Themselves***

Only five youth (9%) included family gang affiliation and involvement as a factor influencing youth involvement in gangs and subsequent difficulty in getting out of the gangs. One teen expanded this theme to greater family issues, such as drug and alcohol problems, that may be impacting the youth's ability to make positive changes.

## Quotes

"The family members need to be already committed to get out of the gang then let them talk."

"Well most of the gang members I know their families are gang members also so that's all they know."

"I think a good motivation for youngsters have to be don't grow up with gang members."

"I think you will have to get him straight first so he can pass the message on to the younger generations and that is how you can help his family members."

"You could try and see if there is any alcohol problems or drug problems at home... Try and get the family to lay off the junk and the kid will follow."

## Research Evidence

Although the research available on family-focused gang interventions is limited, more is known about what the risk factors are for youth gang membership. Family risk factors include living in impoverished or disadvantaged neighborhoods, poor parent-child relationships, low levels of parental attachment, and harsh parental disciplinary methods (Bell, 2009). Other familial predictors of gang membership are poor family management, low bonding between youth and family members, family alcohol and drug problems, parental attitudes favoring violence, and single and/or no parent homes (Hill, Howell, Hawkins, & Battin-Pearson, 1999). Because of these risk factors, researchers commonly find that youth join gangs in order to gain a sense of family and meaningful relationships that they do not experience at home (Bell, 2009).

Clinical interventions for youth who are at risk for joining gangs suggest helping parents develop a strong structure at home that allows for open communication to occur between youth and their parents in addition to establishing clear roles among the members of the family (Clark, 1992). Communication with parents is a protective factor against unhealthy outcomes (Ryan, Miller-Loessi, & Nieri, 2007). Communication encompasses parent initiated communication as well as teen self-disclosure to parents. These forms of communication help teens to discuss what is happening in their lives, aiding teens in making better, more thought-out decisions and allowing parents to be more informed about their child's social life. This supports the youth recommendations for supporting communication with family members through classes or counseling.

Research demonstrates the need for parents to take an interest in their children's lives (Clark, 1992). The youth population discussed in these surveys has difficulty in obtaining and maintaining supportive adults in their lives (Harris, Fried, & Arana, 1995). A year-long qualitative study of Latino, low-income youth involved in gangs found that not having enough guidance, support and attention from their families was a major factor in the youth's choice to join gangs (Halpern, Barker, and Mollard, 2000). When examining what parents were doing to support their children who were at-risk for joining gangs, youth and community program leaders reported that parents went directly to the gangs and asked that their child be left alone. In the same study, youth who left their gangs reported doing so because they realized the negative effect their gang involvement had

on their families. Moreover, the youth cited not wanting to continue to put their family through the pain and challenges as a motivation to stay out of gang life. Family involvement and impact are important aspects of youth's decisions to join and leave gangs. Consistent with participating youth recommendations, family interventions appear to be particularly promising for helping youth stay out or get out of gangs.

## **Community Recommendations**

### ***Keep Youth Busy/Positive Outlet for Emotional Release: Sports or Other Activities***

Nearly half the youth (47%) reported the need for youth to stay busy in positive, non-gang related activities. A common activity cited was sports, which was reported for a variety of benefits (e.g., outlet for aggression, social activity, school-based activity). Other school and community activities were also noted as ways to occupy youth's time, especially after school. Within these responses, there was a repeated concern for the need for these activities to be fun, positive and appropriate outlets for youth.

#### **Quotes**

"Motivate them to play in sports and just keep them busy."

"Keep them after class."

"Keep his mind on something positive."

"Sports like boxing to get all there anger out on one another."

"Better things to keep them bizzy."

"More involved with school and sports."

"Get them involved in other productive activities."

"Find a hobby or a sport to play."

"Having something to keep them busy."

"Provide him with things that will keep them busy also make sure he likes it."

"All we need is thengs that we like to do for fun that our parents can prvide for us because of financial situation."

"I think the way you can help a youngster get out of his gang is by putting him in a program that takes his whole afternoon."

"Also supply him with activities like sports so he can always be busy."

"Help him get into a after school program so he can get out of his hood."

"Bring us more fun things in the community."

"Give them food, money, and a toy like a pocket bike to keep them occupied. That will lure him or her away from the bad crowd."

"Make him or her stay after class for he or she won't get jumped by their old gang."

"Maybe come up with more actives for young kids."

"Make them stay in school and do after school activities so they could stay busy."

"Teachers can support the student by getting him invoved in every school program or activity and off the streets activities they can."

"Keep them busy."

"I think the best way is by putting someone in sports or by helping them graduate high school and go to college."

"By helping us in anyway you can like as helping us to get a job or getting us into sports."

"I think that you can also stay active in sports."

"By helping them find them how to find your natural high, and to stay active and keep your time occupied as much as you can."

"We could make a football team, go to different fun field trips, and anything that can keep us busy. We can start job programs and sports activities."

"They can join us in all the activities we can do to be busy."

"Ask them if they are willing to get out and start hanging with the right crowd and start to go to groups and get a job so they can stay busy."

"You could also try to get the youngsters to play in some kind of sports."

"They [teachers] could also help them try to get in a sport."

"You guys [community members] should get these kids into sports and keep them busy."

"You should take them on fun trips and take them places where they are not in the inviorment of being in a gang."

"I think the teachers should get htem in some after school programs and sports."

"Keep them after school of a littile and give them a part time job."

"Sports can be a good thing for us since as young boys we are active and want to do thing putting activities in our way to keep us busy would slow down the street gangs."

"I think leaders from the community should encourage kids to play sports and stop wasting there time in being in the streets and doing nothing. To be somebody in there life."

"Incouraging the youngster and the homeboys by making like places were teens can hangout and get help with school and familiy problems and how to live a better life."

"The way you guys can motivate young men to get out of gangs is buy showing them how to have a good time out side of their hood in a way that is positive."

"Try and get the boy/girl involved in soccer, basketball, etc... Try to get him/her into a religious youth group that does a lot of outdoorsey trips away from his city/home."

"...and help them stay busy."

"...things that can keep them busy so they don't have time for any gang activity."



### *Help Youth Get a Job*

Similar to the previous theme of keeping busy, another very common theme (47%) was the benefit of youth getting jobs to stay out of gangs. The financial benefit of employment was also noted within these responses. The youth highlighted that law enforcement, community leaders, and family could help youth with vocational guidance and support.

#### **Quotes**

"Help him get a job."

"Help him to positive things like helping him get a job."

"I think community leaders can motivate a youngster by having something to do with a job."

"Offer us jobs because then we don't have to sell drugs to get money and if we get drugs we fight."

"Have more jobs for us to do."

"Maybe work on getting more job for younger kids so they won't have to stay on the streets."

"Show the youngster positive things like how to get a job."

"You guys [community leaders] can open your doors and help the youngster get a job."

"Well I think a good way to help out someone get out of a gang is by helping them get a job"

"[Law enforcement] help him get a job."

"By helping us in anyway you can. Like as helping us to get a job..."

"We can start job programs."

"Get a job so they can stay busy."

"To secure the support of law enforcement officers to help the youngsters get out of his gang they could help them by trying to get him/her a job."

"I think that you should motivate youngster by offering more job or more activity of the youngster beuse I would like to have a job even though I am not involved with gang."

"Provide him with part time job."

"...give them a part time job."

"...help him get a job to keep him busy."

"By trying to lead an example and support them in there life and motivate them to study and get good jobs if they want to get money."

"Help him out with good ideas, and try getting him some help by getting jobs."

"More jobs."

"Give more jobs."

"If he is old enough try to set him/her up with a job."

"...and help him get a job."

"...and help them get jobs [family]."

"help them get jobs."

"gives them the opportunity... to get jobs."

"Help get them a job."

"I the community leaders can motivate a youngster to make the commitment to get out of his street gang by having afternoon job programs."

"I think help him get a job."

### *Community Support: Youth Counseling, Support, Drug Programs*

The importance of the community in helping youth get out of gangs was a reoccurring theme in the youth's responses. Approximately 28% of the Los Prietos boys stated that drug treatment groups, mentorship opportunities, and other community-based programs that focus on helping youth are potential ways to assist youth in choosing to leave gang life. These responses suggested that giving youth places to go and groups to attend would allow youth to talk about their lives and get the support they need.

#### **Quotes**

"It would probably be good to take him to like a program."

"[The community leaders] can counsel [the youngster]. [The community leaders] can also be motivated to get in his life and help him out."

"Put them in programs and get people to talk to them so they can realize the benefits of not gang banging, maybe it will help."

"Help them get into a program and help them stay away from drugs if its possible."

"As community leaders what you can do to motivate a youngster to get out the gang is...a lot of assistance to the struggle and hard work it is to leave."

"Start to go to groups."

"We can tell them to run training for minors that want to try it out."

"You could get the youngster a mentor."

"You can secure the youngsters by taking them places and doing good things for them."

"Encouraging the youngster and the homeboys by making like places where teens can hang out and get help with school and family problems and how to live a better life."

"Well if you get one gang down their enemys will take over...you got to try and tell them 'Hey your enemies are gone! It's over! They're doing good and making lives for themselves!' Then if that doesn't work challenge them. Not like 'You guys can't make it anyway!' Or something like 'Your

enemies could do it, so could you, it's confidential, give us a call at (805-555-5555). Your always welcome, we can help...' "

"You can offer a gang program kind of thing that gives them opportunity..."

"Get him a mentor."

"I think the community leaders can motivate a youngster to make the commitment to get out of his street gang by having afternoon job programs"

"As a community leader you should take drugs off the street and talk to the gangsters and tell them the right thing to do in life."

"What would be best is to put them in activities that will help them communicate. I have this problem because I was a gang member and it's not easy. What would motivate a youngster will be to reward them if they are learning to stay away from trouble."

### *Give Youth Money, Food, Toys, Material Goods*

A few of the youth (10%) suggested that assistance in the form of money would motivate youth to get out of gangs. Most of these responses referred to the money being used for college scholarships for youth.

#### **Quotes**

"Maybe give them money"

"Give them food, money..."

"By simply letting the people be able to fund raise to gain money to move."

"More scholarships in college."

"To secure the support from homeboys the community leaders need to give scholarships to college..."

"They [teachers] can offer them opportunities like scholarships for colleges..."

"They [law enforcement] should advice the youngster to do well by paying for college if they are willing to get out."

#### **Research Evidence**

Research dating back to the 1930s has highlighted the potential the community has in assisting youth offenders and delinquent youth (Berman, 1939). Berman (1939) described youth correctional facilities in the Soviet Union that implemented programs that provided employment, arts, sports, and other group activities to the youth rather than physical punishment and restrictions. Such

strategies continue to be put in place and examined to determine their effectiveness in supporting youth who are considered at-risk or delinquent.

Keeping youth busy through extracurricular activities (e.g., sports teams, clubs, organizations) is commonly viewed as a community-based protective factor for youth (Bynner 2002). Breadth of activity involvement rather than the level of intensity of participation has been shown to be positively associated with less delinquent behaviors through the process of having more community adult support and improved decision making skills (Crean, 2012). Mixed results have been drawn from research examining the idea that athletic involvement decreases delinquent behavior (Miller et al., 2007). For example, Burton and Marshall (2005) found significant correlations between youth involved in sports and aggressive behavior. Other research concluded that youth develop positive social and interpersonal relationship skills as well as decrease conduct problems after being involved in extracurricular activities such as sports teams (e.g., Eccles & Barber, 1999; Dworkin, Larson, & Hansen, 2003).

Job placement and vocational training for youth who are at risk or already involved in delinquent behavior have been researched internationally. One study interviewed more than 300 Chinese juvenile delinquents and found that over half of the youth interviewed stated they needed help finding a job and gaining the skills to obtain a job (Davis, Tang, & Ko, 1998). Job training as an intervention strategy and protective factor has a stronger theoretical basis than actual research support: jobs provide youth with connections to institutions and a sense of responsibility (Leiber & Mawhorr, 1995). An identified precursor and consequence of gang membership is a lack of relationship with institutions such as employment (Dukes, Martinez, & Stein, 1997). One example of a rehabilitation program for juvenile delinquent youth that focused on pre-employment and social skills training is the Second Chance program. The Second Chance program assisted youth in how to find a job, interview skills, job placement, and productive work habits. Comparison group analyses and a one-year follow-up revealed that youth who completed the program were found to commit less severe offenses than youth who did not complete or partake in the program (Leiber & Mawhorr, 1995).

Another study examined the relationship between employment and delinquent behavior and criminal offenses for adult males who were deemed high-risk juveniles involved in the juvenile justice system in the Netherlands (Van der Geest, Bijleveld, & Blokland, 2011). Employment was found to be significantly associated with a reduction in adult offending, with an even stronger association found between stable employment and less offending than temporary employment.

Since the 1990s, several community programs that target youth violence prevention and intervention have been researched and developed into evidence-based models (Edberg et al., 2010). In addition to familial and individual factors that these programs can target, research has identified that community-level risk factors impact youth's involvement in gangs (e.g., neighborhood disadvantages; Edgar et al., 2010). Community programs provide youth who are at risk with alternative things to do and places to be other than being on the streets and/or with potential street gangs (Halpern, Barker, & Mollard, 2000).

Although some are concerned about the iatrogenic effects that may occur when youth with at risk and delinquent behavior are grouped together (Cecile & Born, 2009), community-based programs have demonstrated success with helping youth. One example of a community program is the Juvenile Intervention and Prevention Program (JIPP) in the Los Angeles Unified School District.

JIPP takes a whole child approach to school-based gang intervention and prevention for children identified as at-risk (Koffman, Ray, Berg, Covington, Albarran, & Vasquez, 2009). One study found that students involved in JIPP were more involved in their communities and had better attitudes about themselves, their parents and law enforcement after receiving and participating in the program's supports (Koffman et al., 2009).

Although gang intervention strategies generally encompass a variety of aspects of surrounding youth's lives, community efforts are crucial to successful interventions. Agencies and members involved in the National Youth Gang Suppression and Intervention Program were surveyed to get a better understanding of what gang intervention strategies targeted, known as the Spengel-Curry categorization of gang strategies (Decker & Curry, 2000). Five categories were derived from the responses. Three of the five strategies included the community: social opportunities (education and employment), community organizational change to collectively work toward resolving gang problems, and community mobilization (Decker & Curry, 2000). These ideas are reflected in the youth's responses in this project (e.g., Community Supports, Help Youth Get a Job).

## **School Recommendations**

### ***Teachers Can Provide Emotional/Relational Support***

Many youth (41%) recommended that teachers provide emotional and/or relational support, such as providing advice, supporting their choice to get out of the gang, and encouraging their efforts.

#### **Quotes**

"[Teacher can] tell them how proud they are of him."

"[Teacher] give advice."

"[Teacher] support them."

"[Teachers] should do something big for a kid cause it's hard to get out a gang."

"The teachers can keep supporting him."

"Teachers could only help us by bring faithful and encouraging to leave the gang life."

"Make sure the student can come to the teacher Is he/she needs any type of support."

"Get to know that student and realize they are going through a rough patch."

"[Teachers] give him good advice so that he can be successful in life."

"[Teachers] talk to them and see they are successful in life also motivated the kid."

"I think the only thing [teachers] can do is keep supporting them and keep having them to not going back to the gang and start doing the wrong thing."

“[Teachers] they should try to get close to us.”

“They [teachers] can encourage us to do better and achieve.”

“[Teachers] support us in school and help us as much as they can and let us know that they are there for us when we are in need of help.”

“[Teachers] help him out with good ideas.”

"Teachers should support kids in any way they can..."

"[Teachers] Go easy on them. When your part of the hood you don't really care for school. They will be far behind!"

"[Teachers] To tell them they can change there life around and can make with a better life."

"[Teachers] Maybe give them lectures and talks on how to change around..."

"[Teachers] Educate them on the importance of getting out of the gang."

"[Teachers] First of all congratulate the student by telling the student he or she has a positive choice that would help him in the long run."

"[Teachers] ...also to support the kid."

"[Teachers] It's good to let them know that they still have support so they won't go back into something worse."

"[Teachers] to encourage him to do good..."

## **Research Evidence**

Research literature discussing effective school-based interventions for at-risk or gang-involved youth is limited. Studies have focused almost exclusively on identifying risk and protective factors associated with gang involvement, including those factors related to schools and teachers. These studies have found that juveniles are at a higher risk for gang membership when they have low commitment and attachment to school (Hill, Howell, Hawkins, & Battin-Pearson, 1999), low academic achievement, and the presence of learning disabilities (Hill, Lui, & Hawkins, 2004). In addition, Bell (2009) analyzed similarities and differences between male and female gang members in the 7<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grades and found that female gang members feel less safe at school than male gang members, but that school safety significantly predicted gang membership for both genders.

Many Los Prietos youth mentioned the importance of teachers showing respect and positive attitudes towards gang-involved youth and providing emotional and relational support for youths' efforts to leave gangs. Research literature has supported the importance of positive teacher-student relationships in preventing and/or decreasing youth delinquency. Rudasill, Reio, Stipanovic, and

Taylor (2010) found poor student-teacher relationships to predict student risky behavior. Similarly, bonding with teachers has been found to act as a buffer against the negative influences of associating with deviant peers (Crosnoe, et al., 2002). Positive student-teacher relationships can significantly impact adolescent students' behavioral and emotional trajectories over time (Wang, Brinkworth, Eccles, 2012). In a longitudinal study of student depression and misconduct from ages 13-18 years, Wang and colleagues (2012) found that positive teacher-student relationships at age 13 protected against depression and misconduct from 13 to 18 years old and that positive teacher-student relationships moderated the effect of early poor effortful control and negative parent-child relationships on misconduct throughout adolescence. However, some studies have found that school personnel supportiveness is not related to gang involvement (Ryan, Miller-Loessi, & Nieri, 2007).

The importance of trust in helping relationships seemed to underscore many of the recommendations that youth made. The research literature has not directly addressed the association between trust in relationships and youth leaving gangs, but there is evidence that trustworthiness in student-teacher relationships is important to adolescents, particularly adolescents from minority groups. Gregory and Ripski (2008) examined the relations between adolescent student discipline, student defiant behavior, and student perceptions' of their teachers as trustworthy through interviews and surveys. They found that having a relational approach to discipline decreased student defiance, but that this association was mediated by student perceptions of teacher trustworthiness. Relationship building and trustworthiness are thus important in deterring behavior problems in school.

It appears to not only be specific teacher-student relationships that can impact youth delinquency, but also the broader school climate. Payne (2008) examined the relation between communal school organization (i.e., whether schools have supportive relationships, a common set of goals and norms, and a sense of collaboration/involvement), school bonding, and youth delinquency. Using a sample of over 13,000 students from across the U.S. Payne (2008) found that individual students in more communally organized schools demonstrated less delinquency and greater school bonding; individual students with higher school bonding demonstrated less delinquency, as well. Furthermore, in a survey of a diverse sample of U.S. 8<sup>th</sup> graders Esbensen, Peterson, Taylor, and Freng (2009) found that youths' perception of a negative school environment is predictive of gang affiliation. These findings suggest that the relationships students have with both the broader school and specific teachers have important implications for youth delinquency and gang involvement.

### ***Teachers Should Provide Extra School Help/Assistance***

The third category includes quotes from 24% of the surveyed youth, which recommended that teachers provide extra help and assistance in school to youth who are trying to get out of a gang.

#### **Quotes**

"[Teachers can] keep trying to help them out by giving them classes."

"[Teacher give] extra help."

"[Teacher] help them out with school."

"[Teacher] help him stay focused in school."

"[Teachers] ...willing to help them out it school more."

"[Teachers] ...try to help them out in school..."

"[Teachers] they should help us in school."

"[Teachers] They can help us graduate and do anything they can do to catch up with our credits."

"[Teachers] could help them with their school work."

"[Teachers] support us in school and help us as much as they can."

"[Teachers] Support kids in there studies and be there for them. Give them good advice on having an education and what good benefits education can lead to."

"[Teachers] don't overwhelm them with work."

"[Teachers] Get them and there homies together in school find out whose smartest and let him tutor the group."

"They [teachers] can help them with their work..."

### *Teachers Can Help Youth Stay in Schools, Graduate*

Twenty-two percent of the youth surveys encouraged teachers to help students stay in school, get good grades, and graduate, in an effort to help youth leave gangs.

#### **Quotes**

"[Teacher} help them out with school so they are not failing."

"[Teacher] help him stay in school."

"Teachers can help us by getting our hs diploma and encouraging us."

"[Teachers] make them stay in school."

"[Teachers] you could help by graduate high school and keep him in school and college and make new friends."

"[Teachers] they can help us graduate."

"[Teachers] help him stay in school and get his education."

"[Teachers}... and help them graduate high school..."

"[Teachers] ... and help the kids with all the necessities to graduate from high school."

"Help them graduate." [teachers]

"[Teachers] Teach the youngster the importance of learning and how difficult life will be without a diploma."

"[Teachers]... and make go to school and learn."

"...and help him graduate high school..."; "[Teachers] To help him succeed..."

## **Research Evidence**

Findings regarding the relation between academic achievement and gang affiliation have been mixed. For example, Lurigio and colleagues (2008) surveyed students in the Chicago Public Schools and did not find an association between students' commitment to school and their gang membership status. Tapia, Kinnier & MacKinnon (2009) compared GPA, attitudes towards teachers, and attitudes towards school between Mexican American youth in gangs and those not in gang and did not find any significant differences between these school-related variables for the two groups. Conversely, utilizing data from the Rochester Youth Development Study (RYDS) Krohn, Schmidt, Lizotte, and Baldwin (2011) found that gang membership was associated with having low educational aspirations, among other factors. Similarly, Choi (2007) found academic performance to significantly predict delinquency and gang initiation for Asian and Vietnamese American youth. Gang-involved youth are also more likely to dropout of school (Jenson & Howard, 1998).

Crosnoe, Erickson, & Dornbusch (2002) found that youth were less likely to join a gang if they had good feelings about their academic skills, believed education leads to future career success, were bonded to school, and had positive relationships with peers and mentors. Using structural equation prediction models, Dishion, Nelson, and Yasui (2005) were able to explore the relation between various risk factors in 6<sup>th</sup> grade and their impact on gang affiliation in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Results of the study indicated that peer rejection, academic failure, and antisocial behavior in 6<sup>th</sup> grade predicted gang involvement in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. The authors suggest that school failure should be addressed in interventions aimed at reducing gang involvement for at-risk middle schoolers.

### *Teachers Can Make School More Fun and Relevant*

This category describes quotes from 12% of the youth who recommended that teachers make school more meaningful, engaging, and fun. This includes tailoring activities to the interests of the youth.

#### **Quotes**

"That teacher should get the student more fun stuff that you could have fun"

"[Teacher] help him find out what he's good at"

"Teach in school what you can do in life. Be something big by being famous not infamous"

"The teachers can support by showing us a lot of things like more education."

"[Teachers] Do fun things in class to get the youngsters attention to the lesson."

"What teachers can do to help a student get out of a gang is try to teach youngster's something they enjoy to do. For example, if they like to draw they can get into art."

"[Teacher]... and to give him something that he likes to do that would encourage him to keep doing good and not get back into his normal ways."

Not all youth provided recommendations that were specific to teachers. Some of the youth who did not provide recommendations specific to teachers suggested interventions that were coded as broader interventions. For example, the teacher should "help him get a job" and "give them good thoughts of going to college."

## **Research Evidence**

Although findings have been mixed, numerous researchers have suggested increasing student engagement in school to decrease youth school dropout and involvement in gangs. Sharkey and colleagues (2011) suggest that schools make a greater effort to make classroom learning relevant and enjoyable for students. Surveys of 7<sup>th</sup> grade students found meaningful participation, which is defined as "...the involvement of the student in relevant, engaging, and interesting activities with the opportunities for responsibility and contribution" (Benard, 2002, p.9; as cited in Jennings, 2003), to be related to both higher GPAs and caring peer and adult relationships in school (Jennings, 2003). For at-risk youth, alternative schools have been found to increase school performance, self-esteem, and school attitude (Kolduboy, 2004). While few studies have directly measured the impact of making school more meaningful for at-risk youth on gang involvement, Pesce and Wilczynski (2005) suggest that school-based programs aiming to decrease gang involvement must focus on this. In a theoretical discussion of the role of schools in preventing youth gang involvement, Sharkey and colleagues (2011) suggest that gangs may meet youths' need for self-esteem and that schools may be able to more positively meet this psychological need by making school material more relevant to youth and by designing curriculum to the specific strengths of each student.

### ***Change Teacher's Attitudes Towards Gang Members, Show Respect, Treat Same as Others***

The final teacher-focused category describes 10% of the youth who recommended that teachers respond to gang-involved youth with respect and positive attitudes. There was a general sense that youth perceive teachers as treating gang-involved youth differently than non-gang involved youth.

## Quotes

"[Teachers can] show more respect."

"[Teacher] just change there attitude on the student."

"[Teacher] treat the student more differently as they would used to."

"[Teacher] to not give up on the kid just cause he was into gangs don't matter nothing."

"[Teacher] don't put the kid down."

"Gang banger students and non-gangbanger students should be treated the same [by teachers]."

"[Teachers] just give us the fair education and help us change the bad habits so we could succeed in getting an education."

## Law Enforcement Recommendations

### *Stop Harassing Youth*

The largest theme among the responses regarding law enforcement was the need for law enforcement to stop harassing youth and leaving the youth alone; 40% of the youth provided responses in this category. Comments included stopping restrictions, gang lists, and arrests of youth affiliated or thought to be affiliated with gangs.

## Quotes

"Anything cops do is make things more bad they lock up foos just for being together."

"[Law enforcement] stop harassing us like everytime they see me they stop me and ask me stupid questions."

"[Law enforcement] just need to mind your own business."

"Stop putting us on restrictions because then we fight because we are together."

"Law enforcement officers need to stop harassing the gang bangers and make peace."

"[Law enforcement] stop locking them up just because were in a gang."

"[Law enforcement]not harass them by putting them on blast, don't go around asking it it's true."

"Officers should not just arrested them."

"Stop harrassing people who look like gang members and stop stereotyping."

“As a community leader what you can do to motivate a youngster to get out of the gang is no more harassment from the cops...”

“Have them [law enforcement] stop harassing the youngster and putting him on blast for getting out.”

“[Law enforcement] to not always bug us.”

“We can tell them to not pull us over just because of how we look and dress.”

“The law enforcement should stop messing with us because it makes us mad and do more things that we are not supposed to do.”

“Law enforcement officers should not come at youngsters at such an aggressive way.”

“I think that the cops can't stop gang members because they harass every day and night.”

“Especially the cops in Lompoc!”

“If he wants out maybe they can take him off the gang list. That will help him out.”

“[Law enforcement] Stop getting in their face.”

“I think law enforcement should not be labeling kids and be messing with them for no apparent reasons because that is just causing hatred.”

“...and don't immediately jump on the lock up cause your dirty!”

“[Law enforcement] Stop harassing is what the cops need to stop doing. And be fair.”

“Law enforcement needs to be willing to actually help before helping, not just out trying to arrest a gang member.”

“What law enforcement should do is stop rolling gang members that are registered and get the information and facts first.”

“[Law enforcement] I think to not lock them up because once you get locked up your back with homies from your gang.”

“[Law enforcement] Well, I don't know, but you should think of them equally, and shouldn't arrest them a lot and raid their pools...”

## **Research Evidence**

Determining which youths are in gangs is a challenging process that is often based on indicators such as association with other gang members. There is stigma associated with being in a gang for

family members, school services, (Bullock & Tilley, 2008). Being labeled as a gang member can have many unintended consequences such as closing opportunities for services by providers who don't want to serve gang members, may alienate youths and families who resist the label, and may give youth behavior a prominent status that is undeserved (Bullock & Tilley, 2008).

Frequently in the United States, the police response to gang involvement and youth violence has been to implement zero tolerance punitive strategies that have led to negative police-youth interactions and created a police-youth relationship that is characterized by stereotypes, misunderstandings, mistrust, and hostility (Carstarphen & Shapiro, 1997). A negative relationship between police and youths can result in misperceptions that perpetuate feelings of mistrust and lead to increasingly hostile and violent interactions (Pruitt & Rubin, 1986). Moreover, repeated harassment or stops by police of youth who fit a gang member profile may serve to push otherwise innocent youth into gangs due to resentments from repeated stops and searches based on appearances (Densley, 2011). Surveys of residents in high-crime areas have found that residents feel the police focus too much on crime and not enough on quality of life; community members wish to be treated with respect. (Lurigio et al., 2008). In one study, minority youths had more critical views of police than White youths and general impressions were mixed; youth reported they felt that although police officers were friendly and hardworking, they could also be dishonest and discriminatory (Taylor Turner, Esbensen, & Winfree, 2001).

Studies with youth living in cities have found that a majority of youths have had negative contact with law enforcement. For example, 84% of 968 youth surveyed by the Chicago Alliance for Neighborhood reported being treated disrespectfully or seeing others treated disrespectfully by police officers (Wisby, 1995). In response to gang and youth violence, police may react with intolerant tactics designed to punish youth and some surveillance strategies involve profiling, which can result in disproportionate minority contact (Borrero, 2001). Research has shown that youths who fit a gang member profile were more likely than other youths to be subjected to police harassment (Borrero, 2001). "The present state of affairs between some police and many youth, urban and nonurban, particularly African American and Latino youth, is one of disrespect, fear, distrust, hostility, and violence" (Borrero, 2001, p. 407). Borrero (2001) recommends facilitating a safe forum for sharing issues, a youth-police relations committee, and for other providers and community members to intervene with and advocate for youth.

### *Improve Relationships between Law Enforcement and Youth*

The youth (34%) reported that law enforcement officers should talk to youth as a means for the law enforcement to get to know the youth's struggles. These responses reflected the importance of working on the relationship between youth and law enforcement by changing both sides' perceptions of each other, having the law enforcement better understand the youth as well as the youth better understanding that the law enforcement are there to help.

#### **Quotes**

"[Law enforcement] should have classes with the kids and there family and see why they do what they do."

"The law enforcement officers I think could just give advice to the youngster."

"All law enforcement an do is like talk to the minor because it is the minors choice if he would want to get out of his gang."

"What law enforcement should do is start talking to the youngster when he is first started to bang and that can help them."

"Make them see that law enforcement is not there to bust them but to actually look out for them and help them correct their mistakes."

"[Law enforcement] should also take their time trying to convince them that being a gang member is wrong. Most officers don't eve say much when they arrest them."

"Have them talk to each other and the officers don't even know what the people go thru."

"[Law enforcement] teach them how would there lifes end up and be like."

"[Law enforcement] not give up on him and help him get out the gang."

"[Law enforcement] by helping him out and always being their when he needs someone to talk to..."

"[Law enforcement] to not always bugging us and also to try to help us out."

"To secure the support of law enforcement officers to help the youngsters get out his gang ...they could also interact with them and get to know the kids."

"There is not much community leaders can do to secure the support of law enforcement of officers to help us because they are already trying to help us even though it doesn't feel, or look like it the are trying to help. Show us the good side of life and how it would be without gangs."

"[Law enforcement] help kids bearyl growing by incourging them into some else then just being in the streets."

"To tell them [law enforcement] how it hurt your family to see what goes throw there lives."

"Talk to the officers. Tell them reasons why they should help the youngster."

"Community leaders can help secure the support of law enforcement officers to help the youngster get out of his gang by advising them about the ways the youngster has been trying to change and leave the gang."

"Law enforcement needs to be willing to actually help before helping..."

"They [law enforcement] should advice the youngster to do well..."

"I think you should give that person to have the chnace to have a clean start with no probation, so that they have no trouble with the law, and if they want to mess that up then that's them."

## Research Evidence

Community policing is a law enforcement strategy that capitalizes on community partnerships between law enforcement and private citizens to solve community problems (Carstarphen & Shapiro, 1997). Problem solving is used to address violence. School resource officers are employed to work in schools towards this end. In one case study in Washington D.C., police-youth relationships were severely strained after zero tolerance policing models lead to community member mistrust of police. Negative stereotypes were reinforced as police and community members either avoided or confronted each other. University doctoral students met with a Latino youth organization and police lieutenant to offer to conduct a dialogue process to start reducing tensions. The dialogue with a few key representatives from each side was prompted by questions such as “What do you think they think about you? Is this true or not?” and “What would you like the relationship to be like with the police/youths?” The goals of the dialogue were to create better understanding of each other, reduce tensions and violence, improve relationships, identify commonalities, and construct “joint action projects.” The dialogue facilitated relationship building and mutual respect and understanding (Carstarphen & Shapiro, 1997).



### *Law Enforcement Should Stay on Top of What Kids Do*

In direct contrast to the previous theme, a few (14%) of the youth responded that law enforcement should monitor youth. Most of these responses included law enforcement arresting and/or taking other legal action against youth as a means to show youth what happens when they are involved in gang life.

#### Quotes

"[Law enforcement] help them do the right thing and just stay on top of what you do."

""[Law Enforcement] got to keep watch on them till they get tired of it."

"Let law enforcement officers know what activities or enemies they should keep away from each other."

"Well when I get out I have to register as a gang-member. I feel like they are doing a good job on breaking down on that. Because I know now that I'm not even going to walk down the street with a homie because I would get locked up for a while."

“Get him in trouble as much as they can.”

“Lock him up for a couple of years.”

“Tell the police what's going on and ask for they're help too.”

"What police enforcement should consider doing is to get a gang injunction because that will really help the community and it's gang problems. They should support the youngster by watching out for him if he/she ever tries to get out."

"What law enforcement officers can do to help youngsters get out of gangs is they can increase the no gang tolerance and encourage youngsters that gang are good for nothing and cause them to arrest youngsters at young ages."

## **Research Evidence**

Generally, legal sanctions do little to deter crime, and gang members may be less susceptible to threats of punishment than nongang criminals (Maxon, Matsuda, & Hennigan, 2011). In a cross-sectional study involving interviews with 744 gang and nongang youth with criminal histories, Maxon et al. (2011) found that morality (reported by youths on a Likert scale of how “right or wrong” it was to commit three types of crime) was the strongest predictor of intention to commit future crimes, whereas severity of consequence had a weak effect only for nongang members. Certainty (but not severity) of punishment was significantly and negatively related to only one crime, car theft, for gang members. These results suggest that interventions should primarily target intrinsic motivations for ending involvement in crime and that increasing the certainty of apprehension is more important than raising the severity of punishment.

## **Gang Interventions**

### *Work with the Whole Gang Together*

In response to the question “As community leaders, what can we do to secure the support of the youngster’s homeboys to get out of a gang?” 40% of the youth offered suggestions of working with the whole gang together to discuss getting out of the gang. Specifically, some responses reflected gang members or ex-gang members talking to and supporting each other to get out of the gang. Eliminate the gang was another suggestion that fell into this theme.

## **Quotes**

"[homeboys] to motivate them in what they did to get out of a gang."

"You got to have some of his homeboys to want to help him out."

"Find a way to eliminate the whole gang."

"Eliminate the gang."

"Eliminate enemy gang's or find a way to separate enemies."

"[the homeboys] should talk to one another and give each other advice so that they want to stop being from the neighborhood."

"Get [the homeboys] together and talk about stuff like reality and how to move on."

"He would have to talk to the [homeboys] that are willing to get out [of the gang]."

"Teach [homeboys] they don't need to call themselves something or fight to get what they want."

"Tell him/her that it wasn't meant to be for his or her life."

"To secure their homeboys support is to get them out the gang too or the youngster won't have no support from them."

"Get him to tell the homeboys that he is going to change his life around."

"By having people meet the people that have already went through the gang life that have seen murders happen that he has lost and what regrets of killing a person or being cautious 24-7 that will stay there whole life."

"Have someone that already went through it tell why he wished he could take everything that he did wrong involving gangs back"

"...Have motivational guest speakers come in and talk about gangs that actually been through that situation [commitment to get out his gang]."

"This is how you could motivate a youngster to make the commitment to get out of his street gangs you could have people that been in a gang a that as moved on from that life style."

"To secure the support of the youngster's homeboys to get out of a gang is you could try to talk to his/her homeboys and let them know that she/he wants a different lifestyle."

"To secure and support a youngsters homeboys to get out of a gang is to be a part of their life and to talk to them."

"The one thing you can do is show them the life of a person that succeeded in the right choices maybe talk to them and get their permission."

"Get them [homeboys] out of the gang as well, or don't even mention his name to the other homeboys."

"Try and get all the homies together and take them to the local jail/YA and let them talk to ex gang members and what they're in for. Try and get to each boy separately though! Nobody in a gang wants to look like a punk in front of their BARRIO!"

"I think we can support them [homeboys] by talk about it and how it effects your life."

"You can go up to the gang [homeboys] and let them know what you guys can do and let them know that you can help them but they have to be able to trust you."

"Maybe you can change at least one gang member and he can get in touch with his homeboys to get out of the gang because they can relate especially if the person that go out of the gang has good to show for it."

"1. Get in touch with his homeboys. 2. Have a group counseling sessions with the youngster and his homeboys." "Have them talk to former gang members."

"Community leaders can secure the support of the youngsters homeboys to get out of a gang by encouraging them to do the same as their friend."; "Second if the student would be ok with it, let the teacher use him as an example to other students who are involved with gangs and want to leave them, that just don't know how to leave."

"I think you will need to talk their older homies and tell them to talk to their little homies and tell them to make a change."

## **Research**

Research has not focused on working with whole gangs to transform their behavior to the positive. However, some research has focused on working with gangs to reduce violent and criminal behavior. Research has demonstrated that it is more important to focus on deterring crime than it is to target gangs or gang membership in and of itself (Bullock & Tilley, 2008). The Boston Gun Project, for example, used data to generate responses to gang-related violence with strategies focused on deterrence (Braga & Kennedy, 2002). Police threatened intensive and sweeping enforcement when specific, pre-determined, and communicated crimes were committed. Such communication with gang members allowed gangs to acknowledge their role in gaining the attention of law enforcement from their actions. At the same time, service providers offered programs to help gang members engage in the community. When this project was replicated in Manchester, England, the purpose drifted to a focus on getting individuals out of gangs and cooperating with service providers. This caused many unintended negative consequences including a focus on labeling youth as gang members, disagreement between providers on criteria for the gang label and subsequent intervention eligibility, and too large a target population (Bullock & Tilley, 2008). Thus, evaluators concluded that effective deterrence should focus on criminal behavior not gang membership status.

### *There is Nothing You Can Do*

In response to the same question, 38% of the youth suggested that there was nothing to be done to help homeboys help each other get out of gang life. Some of the responses indicated that there was nothing community leaders could do because the youth themselves may not want to get out of the gang or their homeboys do not want them to leave the gang. Another common sentiment was the need for the youth to want and decide to leave the gang.

## Quotes

"I think its hard to make some youngster leave his gang because their hang has them brain washed or something and they don't wanna be a b\*\*\*\* or a lame."

"I don't think theres anything you can do to make him change his ways because he is gonna be into his gang so much that he won't listen to anybody but his gang."

"The youngster might not want to get out of his gang."

"The person and there homeboys may not want to get out of the gang there in. It would be hard to get out so they rather not."

"At the end it all depends on the youngsters mind."

"Nothing can be done about [securing the support of the youngster's homeboys to get out of a gang]."

"If there older then him its not possible [to help a youngster secure the help of his family members]."

"You can't [secure the support of the youngster's homeboys to get out of a gang]. It doesn't work that way. The 'homeboys' don't want him to get out, no matter what it's for."

"It depends because not all his homeboys are going to want to get out of the gang."

"I honestly don't think there is anything you can do on [securing the support of the youngster's homeboys to get out of a gang]. It's all up to the kid."

"You can't it's already too late to get what your trying to say through their heads."

"I have no idea on this one because if it's your homeboy most likely he is a part of the gang also."

"And if your putting in work for a gang another homie is not going to tell you to stop."

"The truth is that there isn't really anything you guys can do. Its up to us if we want to get of the street gang."

"Tell them that is being gang member fun or what because you have your choice to stop banging."

"We can't do anything unless they are willing to. We can't force them."

"...to be honest with you I don't think youngsters or homeboys would get out of the gang."

"There is not much you could do because its there choices and there is nothing anyone can do to change the choices they make."

"It is very possible [get support of homeboys] but honestly I don't think you can do that because of the fact that the youngsters so called homies will flip on them."

[What can teachers do to support a student?] "Not much."

"First of all the person has to make the choice of getting out of the gang."

"I don't think you can do anything"; "I don't think you can do anything because the gang is their family."; "You can do anything because everyone has a different mentality."

### *Call for Peace between Rivals*

One third (33%) of the responses discussed bringing the rival gangs together to help youth get out of gangs. Some responses discussed having a peace or truce made between gangs. Other responses further reflected the need to connect enemies and show both sides that they are not different from one another. Some responses specifically noted that the call for peace would need to be between the individuals who want to get out of their gangs and the enemy.

#### **Quotes**

"Tell them that we call peace between them and that we don't want no trouble."

"Make rivals try to connect to each other then make them realize that now since they don't have rivals theres no need to gang bang."

"Make them learn that there enemies are not so different."

"Tell [the enemies] that if there wasn't sides and you guys knew each other you would probably be best friends. You are all alike."

"Have both of them [rivals] have a seat and talk about life."

"By doing the same thing for both sides [rivals] not treat them different."

"To not care of his enemies just if he see them to not talk shit or tell them he stop banging."

"I think we should make the rivals work together to stay out of the gang because if they work together they would see that they have stuff in common and they would start to talk to each other."

"By showing them [rivals] that were pretty much the same. And also by helping them to start knowing there enemies."

"To secure the support of the youngsters enemies to get out of a gang you could try to make a group that let's the youngster's enemies interact with each other and they could talk upon their self."

“Show us ...how we could change the community with no street gang violence of just because you're in the wrong side of the hood. Just encourage us to have peace and not fight over a dumb thing.”

“Tell them that he does not want beef and does not want any problems and not claiming anything.”

"...and special events with rival members, so they can have the understanding that they are much different."

"Try and have a peaceful meeting between them [enemies]."

"Let the youngsters enemies know that the youngster is no longer in a gang and he doesn't want any trouble."

"Letting the youngster's enemies know that the youngster is no longer putting it down for his gang."

"Tell them the same with his homeboys and why is there beef [between enemies].?"

"I don't know about this questions but all I know that if we were able to get along in our community then they will no gangs, and no enemies. So it's best to prove ourselves and support each other that were worth more then filling up jails and prisons."

"You can show and or tell them it is not worth losing your life in a gang fight or shoot other gang members just because their in another gang or they live on the wrong side of the street. Everyone is the same."

## **Research**

In 1992, rival gang members in Los Angeles signed a peace treaty that that promised a cease fire against enemies and focused on addressing social problems in the community (<http://www.streetgangs.com/features/041412-watts-peace-treaty>). The *Street Gangs* website attributed a 40-year low rate of gang-related violence to this peace treaty. Additional media support this conclusion, *The Final Call* reported a 44% drop in gang homicides in the first two years after the gang truce ([http://www.finalcall.com/artman/publish/National\\_News\\_2/article\\_8843.shtml](http://www.finalcall.com/artman/publish/National_News_2/article_8843.shtml)). Peace agreements between rival gangs have been implemented in Santa Barbara. For example, in March 2008 Collaborative Communities Foundation mediated a peace agreement between rival gangs and held a neighborhood event where gang members could hang out without fear of police or enemy gang intervention (Lindberg, 2008). It is difficult to isolate the direct impacts of peace treaties, but consensus appears to be that they are an effective tool to stop gang violence.

### *Develop Friendships Outside of Gangs*

A suggestion reported across questions was to have youth develop friendships with individuals not in their gangs. About one quarter (22%) of the youth wrote that having youth hangout with people and form friendships outside of gangs would assist youth in getting out of their gangs. A few responses in this theme included the idea of getting new friends and realizing that gang members are not real friends.

## Quotes

"You have to make them convince themselves that gangs is not the only sign of friendship because they cant see that on their own."

"To make them understand that there not really friends."

"Teach [the homeboys] that they can all just be friends."

"Help them [enemies] be cool with there friends."

"By helping him get new friend."

"You could help [teacher] by ...make new friends."

"By telling him the truth and only the honest truth that no matter how much you feel your so called "homies" are going to have your back their not. The only people that will ever be there for you are your loved ones."

"Ask them if they are willing to get out and start hanging with the right crowd."

"Remove him away from those influences, so he will not be pressured once again."

"You can put him in a different school or different farther area so he doesn't get pressured by the same people."

"Explaining to the youngster that if someone does not want them to be happy then they are not a real homeboy."

"What teachers can do is make them hangout with a different crowd of people..."

"They [family] can encourage a youngster to stop hanging out with the wrong people."

"I would talk to them and tell them, you know you're a good kid, if you change your ways then I'll be your homeboy and you don't have to worry about all this gang life."

### *You Can't Change Enemies - They Don't Care about Each Other*

Lastly, 14% of the responses to the enemies question reflected a similar sentiment to the question about homeboys helping youth get out of gangs: there is nothing that can be done. All of these responses noted that enemies do not like or care about each other and thus enemies will not help each other.

## Quotes

"I don't know about if they can do that (get the youngster's support to get enemies out of a gang)."

"There enemies they don't get along."

"There is nothing that can be done about [securing the support of the youngster's enemies to get out of a gang."

"You can't [secure the support of the youngster's enemies to get out of a gang". The 'enemies' don't care any which way. Whether the person wants to change, the enemy can care less."

"I think that you can't really do nothing to help the youngsters' enemies because the youngster wouldn't give his enemies any kind of hood advice."

"I think that there is no way that the youngster can give his enemies advice to get out of a gang because they are rivals and rival gangs don't give advice to each other."

"You can't [secure the support of enemies] because they chose the route they wanted and their enemy already has built hatred toward him."

"Enemies are enemies if you don't like somebody that's called a enemie. You just don't like them for a reason. So I don't think anything can change that."

"I don't think you can do anything because they [enemies] think different."

### *Beat Them Up*

Only two (6%) responses noted violence as a means to help a youth get out of his/her gang.

#### **Quotes**

"Gang bang them to teach them a lesson."

"To secure the support of the youngsters enemies they need to let us get in a fight with them so that we won't have to get in more fights."

### **Green Lighting**

#### *Move Out of Town*

The majority of the responses to the green light question (55%) suggested the youth leave their current town to seek refuge in another place. Some of the respondents further included ideas of obtaining witness protection and/or changing the youth's identity in order to escape the green light.

#### **Quotes**

"What I think you can do to someone who been green-lighted is tell them to start new, move out of town. If they don't wanna do that then tell them to not get locked up because if they do then stuff is gonna keep happening to them"

"Move him to a different town or city. Change his first or last name (to help a youngster who has been green-lighted)"

"They can probably help him to move somewhere else or move somewhere else but in his city or town he lives in so he wont be in that gang area but still in his city or town"

"He has to leave town and start fresh in another city were nobody knows him [to help a youngster who has been green-lighted]"

"The only thing you can do is move the kid from the gang territory and gang members [to help the youngster who has been green-lighted]"

"Only thing that I think is that to get out of that town and he should be good [from green-lighted]"

"Tell them to move far away or somewhere where they aren't known [to help a youngster who has been green-lighted]"

"[help a youngster who has been green-loghted] by putting him in witness protection"

"So the best way for his safety is the be pc'd [protective custody] up."

"You wont be able to take the green light away but you can try and get him moved away or stuck in his house all day to ensure his health and safety."

"leave town"

"First about that's hes stuff and that why he got green lighted and to move to another city"

"To move to a better community to get away from all the crime"

"You could also make the kid move out of town"

"I think that if your going to help a youngster who has been green-lighted by a local gang you should give him a more secure place or home"

"We have the youngster to move to a different town far away that we all know he will be safe at."

"Move cities and never go back to that city again. That's what I think will solve the problem! I dont know any other solution!"

"I don't have a answer to answer that because that's his fault for messing up but my option just to be pc'd [protective custody] up."

"Remove him far away from the gangs so no green light could be called on them."

"...unless they move away from the hot spots."

"There's really nothing you can do besides relocate them"

"To move out where they live by."

"You definitely have to move him away out of state and get him a new identity."

"You need to change him around and move the kid in another far away place so that he does not have any contact with that gang. Try and change his name or living standards so that he doesn't get hurt or even killed. He is not safe no matter what when he is green lighted from a gang."

"Tell him and his family to move out of town."

"Run out of town."

"Maybe move town if possible."

"Relocating the youngster."

"A person who was green lighted is hard to get off. Just stay away from streets and the gang life."

"Move him out of town or just have him transported from place to place so he will be protected."

"It will help a youngster to move them cities. This is because no matter what we do to help him there will always be gang members stalking him to get a chance to beat him up for what he did. They will never be safe if they stay here, what we should consider to do is too kepp them away from the town they were involved with gangs because anytime or anywhere they can get jumped."

"To help a youngster who has been green-lighted by a a gang you can just have him over homes to get him out of the bad neighborhood and also have him not hang out with the wrong people."

### ***Cannot Stop Green Lighting, Nothing You Can Do About a Green Light***

When asked what can be done to "help a youngster who has been green lighted to take the green light away and ensure his health and safety," a large portion of the young men surveyed (40%) commented that nothing could be done. A few responses indicated that nothing could be done to help the youth because the youth received the green light for a reason, but most of the responses in this theme referenced the notion that being green lighted is a punishment that cannot be reversed.

#### **Quotes**

"I don't know. I don't think you can [help a youngster who has been green-lighted]."

"There's nothing you could do...nothing (to help a youngster who has been green-lighted)."

"You can't stop the green lighted off because you have no good homie because they 'rats' it or because they don't know how to bang."

"You can't really take the green-light away."

"We probably can't do anything because when that happens the gangs are serious about it."

"There is nothing to be done. You can't convince the Mexican mafia to take a gang off green-light."

"You can't unfortunately. You can't just take the green light away."

"There's nothing that you can do because when green-lighted it's not good."

"If the youngster has been green-lighted there's nothing you guys could really do because he's going to get what's coming to him no matter what."

"[Being green-lighted] is their fault. They should've never got in it's an incurable kinda thing."

"No way that he can get off [green-light]."

"There is no way that you can help a youngster get off green light."

"You can't really do anything about [green-lighting]."

"You can't take the green-light away once it has been announced."

"You can't once you green light you stay green light."

"That's their fault they messed up I don't think there's a way to get off green lighted."

"You can't do anything because no matter what you do to stop it, they will find him and do what they have to do."

"I don't think you can do anything because once they are on green light they would always be on green there is nothing that can get them off green light."

"You can't do nothing when a youngster is green lighted because if you try to stop it than your getting green lighted."

"Honestly there is nothing you can do about that [green lighting]."

"If they are anything like the real 'homies' there's really nothing you can do [about green lighting]..."

"There is no way [to help youngster who has been green lighted]."

"You can't do nothing [about green lighting]."

## *Work it Out/Lay Low*

One other option offered by the respondents (24%) was to have the youth come to a resolution or solution with the other gang in order to resolve why he/she was green lighted. Within these responses, the young men surveyed indicated that laying low, having others put in a good word, talking with the enemy, and apologizing were ways for the youngster to work out his/her green light.

### **Quotes**

"You can't really take the green-light away but you could try"

"Clearing whatever wrong thing he did or what rule he broke and to clear it"

"No way that he can get off [green-light] unless the person that put him on green-light says that he is no long on green-light"

"try and talk his way out"

"The only way he would get off is if the person that put green-light on him took him off"

"I guess just lay low and hope they forget about that child"

"Make a good word for him"

"I don't know best thing is to tell him what did he is not true"

"You guys could talk to the gang that has green lighted the kid."

"Support them talk to them and give them the help to choose to do the right thing and encourage them and convince them to quite doing the bad things that can affect there health and show them the safety they need for the choices they make"

"If someone has been green-lighted by their gang just get it cleared by the people who shot you green light you will probably have to get in a fight everythime, but you won't be considred a xxxx."

"You could also pay the gang taxes for his safety because if you don't do one or the other that kid will get beat up every day or even killed because that's serious."

"Educate his enemies and try and reason with them."

"You can help a youngster to take the green light away and ensure his health and safety by making contact with a "shot caller" from the gang and ask for forgiveness!"

## *Fight and Show You're Not Scared*

Lastly, two respondents suggested that the youngster who is green lighted could fight to prove him/herself and get off of green light. Both of these responses also included another solution in addition to fighting.

### **Quotes**

"I was in a green light and the way I got off is by fighting all my enemys and showing them that I wasn't scared but it made me look bad. I also stoped hanging out on the streets and started hanging out with other people"

"If someone has been green-lighted by their gang just get it cleared by the people who shot you green light you will probably have to get in a fight every time, but you won't be considred a xxxx."

### **Research Evidence**

No research was found examining the green lighting process of youth gangs. This is a void in the field both for researchers and practitioners.

## **Summary**

In 2011, The South Coast Task Force on Youth Gangs recognized the benefit of obtaining youth perspectives on what might work in Santa Barbara to help youth stay out of or get out of gangs. Research investigating the effectiveness of interventions to reduce violence and increase healthy life outcomes for youths in gangs is very limited. There are many reasons for the dearth of scholarship on gang intervention. In particular, identifying exactly who is in a gang is a challenge. Moreover, given the complexity of gang members' involvement in risk behaviors, interventions tend to be multidimensional and poorly tracked; agencies are not able to share sensitive and protected data without overcoming collaboration and permission challenges. Rigorous methodology is challenged by the ethical mandate to intervene with all youth with as many available programs as possible. Finally, gang risks and behavioral patterns may differ, so what works in a large urban environment may not be the best fit for a smaller suburban community. All of these factors contributed to the need to obtain youth perspectives on what might have worked or what could work to help them cease gang activity.

The South Coast Task Force on Youth Gangs surveyed 58 boys at Los Prietos Boys Camp in Santa Barbara County with seven questions on what community members can do to get youths out of gangs. These participants collectively identified 31 diverse ideas for intervention in 7 areas: overall youth (e.g., discuss negative impact of gangs), family (e.g., impact on your family/family is more valuable), community (e.g., community programs), school (e.g., change teacher's attitudes towards gang members), law enforcement (law enforcement should stay on top of what kids do), gang (work with the whole gang together), and green lighting (e.g., nothing you can do about green lighting) recommendations. In this report, we provided a summary of each recommendations with all of the youth quotes that supported that particular recommendation.

We also reviewed any literature we could find to understand if a youth idea for intervention was supported by research. Although research on interventions to help youth in gangs is sparse, we were able to find some support for more than half of the youth recommendations. Specifically, 18 (58%) have some research evidence for their effectiveness. For example, Los Prietos youth recommended that teachers provide extra support, provide emotional support, make school more fun and relevant, and help youth stay in school. Research by Crosnoe et al. (2002) supports these ideas; they revealed that youth were less likely to join a gang if they had good feelings about their academic skills, believed education leads to future career success, were bonded to school, and had positive relationships with peers and mentors. More sophisticated research is still needed to determine if interventions with teachers to support youths in gangs would help such youth succeed in leading a healthy life within their community.

### **Research Supported Youth Recommendations**

- Promote future aspirations for life, school/college (50%)
- Ensure kids are safe/have a safe place to hang out (17%)
- Family classes, counseling, communication (46%)
- Impact on your family/family is more valuable (29%)
- Family unconditional love, support child in getting out (25%)
- Family keep track of youth, take them to work, spend time with them (21%)
- Keep youth busy/positive outlet for emotional release: sports or other activities (47%)
- Community support: youth counseling, support, drug programs (47%)
- Help youth get a job (28%)
- Teachers can provide emotional/relational support (41%)
- Teachers should provide extra school help/assistance (24%)
- Teachers can help youth stay in school, graduate (22%)
- Teachers can make school more fun and relevant (12%)
- Change teacher's attitudes towards gang members, show respect, treat same as others (10%)
- Stop harassing youth (40%)
- Improve relationships between law enforcement and youth (34%)
- Work with the whole gang together (40%)
- Call for peace between rivals (33%)

Other recommendations were contraindicated by research, meaning they might do more harm than good when applied to youths in gangs. For example, there is evidence that moving gang members from one location to another may only cause them to initiate or enhance gang activity in the new community (Maxson, 1998). Recommendations of "there's nothing you can do" and "youth can't change enemies" speak to the hopelessness of some youth perspectives on gangs. Fortunately, research has shown that various different types of interventions can work to help youth succeed in life after they have become gang members. Additional research is needed to determine which youth might benefit from such interventions under which conditions.

### **Research Contraindicated Youth Recommendations**

- Discuss negative impact of gangs (43%)
- Move to a different town, witness protection, change name (22%)
- Law enforcement should stay on top of what kids do (14%)
- There's nothing you can do (38%)
- You can't change enemies - they don't care about each other (14%)

Finally, youth made recommendations that have little to no research support. Some of these may be promising, such as developing friendships outside of gangs or family members getting out of the gang themselves.

### **Research Neglected Youth Recommendations**

- Family members need to get out of the gang themselves (9%)
- Give youth money, food, toys, material goods (10%)
- Develop friendships outside of gangs (22%)
- Beat them up (6%)
- Green light-Move out of town (55%)
- Green light-Cannot stop green lighting, nothing you can do about green lighting (40%)
- Green light-Work it out/lay low (24%)
- Green light-Fight and show you're not scared (6%)

## **Future Directions**

These youth recommendations highlight the responsibility of everyone in the community to intervene with youth who are in gangs or may be at-risk for joining gangs. Families, teachers, service providers, law enforcement, and other community stakeholders can all contribute. Although individual efforts to enhance youth success are important, research has identified comprehensive and coordinated gang interventions to be the most effective.

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Comprehensive Gang Model is well respected and is based on the National Youth Gang Suppression and Intervention Program (Spergel & Curry, 1993). The five strategies are detailed below based on the work of Decker and Curry (2000). They can be adapted by and tailored for any individual community.

- *Community mobilization* addresses fundamental causes. It creates and expands services to combat larger societal issues such as disproportionate minority contact, an English language learner gap in academic performance, or disproportionate application of exclusionary discipline policies.
- *Social opportunities* also addresses fundamental aspects of gang involvement and include education and the creation of jobs.
- *Organizational change* helps communities gain an awareness of gang issues, help the community mobilize to address gang problems, and/or help form new relationships that will help communities respond to gang problems. This strategy is successful when the task force/collaboration has the support of the citizens in the target neighborhoods.
- *Social intervention* focuses on immediate or crisis issues in response to individual needs such as mentoring and family intervention.
- *Suppression* is used in most cities but must be part of a larger set of strategies for it to be effective. Suppression can have iatrogenic effects by increasing the growth and status of gang members and increase racial disproportionality of law enforcement contact and arrests.

The Juvenile Intervention and Prevention Program (JIPP) is a school-based gang intervention program implemented through a partnership between Los Angeles Police Department; Los Angeles Unified School District; Families in Schools; and California State University, Los Angeles (Koffman et al., 2009). This program targets youth with multiple risks who have demonstrated delinquent tendencies who can be referred by school professionals, the Los Angeles city attorney's

office, or the California Department of Children and Family Services as an alternative to suspension. Specific evidence-based interventions focus on the individual youth, school, family, and community. These involve modules on resistance, empowerment (including Pillars of Success and Ripple Effects curricula), leadership, and parenting. The evaluation showed a number of positive outcomes and is well respected as a successful intervention within the participating school district.

These youth recommendations should be taken into consideration when planning a continuum of services to address youth gang involvement. The South Coast Task Force on Youth Gangs (SCTFYG) is an incredible asset to help the community continue to advance its efforts to address youth gang violence. To date the Task Force has helped to bring together diverse institutions and agencies to identify strategies to address youth gang involvement. Future directions include systematically mapping out a continuum of services to match established gang intervention models, identifying where gaps exist, and filling those gaps with evidence-based interventions-particularly those identified by participating youth as what might be helpful to them. Continuing to enhance coordination between agencies is critical so youth referrals can be tracked to ensure timely intervention and so youth services can be tracked to ensure they are as efficient and effective as possible, avoiding redundancy and addressing needs. Data need to be collected to investigate the impact of individual services as well as the collective effort. With these next steps in place, the South Coast will have in place all of the elements needed to effectively combat youth gang violence.

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