

The California Cities Gang Prevention Network



LA Panel on gang violence: from left to right- LA Police Chief William Bratton, Connie Rice, Bobby Arias and Jeff Carr

Welcome to the tenth bulletin of the California Cities Gang Prevention Network! In addition to providing a brief overview of our second all-team meeting in Los Angeles, this month we spotlight City Corps, one of the programs highlighted at the Los Angeles Conference. City Corps aims to incorporate young people as agents of positive change in their communities.

LOS ANGELES CONFERENCE

The second all-team meeting of the California Cities Gang Prevention Network was held in Los Angeles at The California Endowment's Center for Healthy Communities on February 28-29, 2008. Approximately 100 individuals attended, including teams from each of the thirteen participating cities. The teams were composed of mayors, city council members, police chiefs, representatives from city agencies, and community and faith-based service providers. In addition, representatives from The California Endowment, The California Wellness Foundation, the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund, the California Attorney General's Crime and Violence Prevention Center, the Gang and Youth Violence Policy Office

of the Governor, and Senator Feinstein's office were in attendance. Special guests included Los Angeles Police Chief Bratton; Nancy Matson, Director of the Crime and Violence Prevention Center of the Attorney General's Office; Connie Rice, Co-Director of the Advancement Project, Los Angeles; Paul Seave, Director of Gang and Youth Violence Policy for the Office of the Governor; and Los Angeles Mayor Villaraigosa. The Mayor's Office of Gang Reduction and Youth Development, directed by Jeff Carr, provided local assistance to the Network organizers.

The conference intended to:

- Inspire and remind us why the Network is so important;
- Affirm and highlight strong aspects of current tactics in our host city, Los Angeles;
- Provide opportunities for cross-city learning;
- Reinforce community and other stakeholders roles as essential to comprehensive efforts;
- Engage cities in refining and adopting policy principles in an effort to launch more specific policy framing that would support local gang prevention work;

- Provide time for teams to examine city-wide plans and refine steps toward plan completion and implementation.

Panel sessions focused on Los Angeles’ approach to reducing and preventing gang crime, involving grassroots and other segments of the community in gang work, and discussing policy. Breakout sessions



LA Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa

encompassed school safety and school partnerships, reentry, new enforcement strategies, street outreach, and how to track and measure progress. Additionally, city teams assessed the development and progress of their comprehensive city plans. Participants also toured Homeboy Industries, a

community-based organization that helps at-risk and former gang-involved youth become contributing members of society, through counseling, education, tattoo removal, job training, job placement, and a police ride-along.

Participants gave the conference high ratings in written evaluations. In particular, city representatives praised the Los Angeles panel and the breakout sessions. Many wrote that they felt invigorated and motivated by the conference and that they loved the opportunity to learn about other cities’ activities. About the conference, participants said:

“[The conference] has re-invigorated our urgency and refocused our energy. The sessions showed where we are lacking.”

“Not only does the annual meeting teach us all many things, it is a great boost to our passion and morale.”

“Thank you! Thank you! Thank you! Great job!”

“I have learned so much about what other cities are doing and experiencing. And that each person brought so much information to the table that is going to help our cities.”

“We are ONE community.”

“[The conference] re-energized our anti-gang efforts.”

“[I’m] excited to see so many colleagues working so hard to better their communities.”

Meeting attendees raised several issues that the Network hopes to pursue in more depth such as street outreach—a gang intervention strategy which employs community members, usually former gang members, in reaching out to gang-involved youth with the goal of preventing future gang violence; city-county partnerships; the relationship between schools and the police; girls in gangs; cultural issues related to gangs; working with the media; funding opportunities; crafting and distributing a Public Service Announcement (PSA); legislative updates; and regional coordination. The Network will also continue its work on the policy principles discussed and modified at the meeting.



Chief Bratton speaks to the media

City Corps

Oxnard-based City Corps is a youth development organization that “nurtures personal initiative, fosters leadership development, and teaches civic responsibility and active citizenship to its members. [City Corps believes] in recognizing and affirming the individual worth and contributions of today’s youth in the community.” The California League of Cities’

recognized City Corps' work through its Helen Putnam Award. The City Corps' model is currently being replicated in the cities of Ventura and Santa Barbara.

Created in 1995 within Oxnard's Recreation and Community Services Department, City Corps provides work opportunities for youth between the ages of 12 and 24. Since its inception, over 7,000 youth have volunteered more than million hours with City Corps. Projects are varied and include neighborhood cleanups, graffiti removal, a wetland restoration project, and helping senior citizens with chores in their homes. Initially, the organization focused on youth from Ventura County Probation Agency; it has now expanded to serve all interested youth.

According to its founder, Efren Gorre, City Corps uses "community service as a beacon for youth development." Through community service, youth can acquire work experience and leadership skills. City Corps' Townkeepers program encourages young people to take ownership of their communities. Volunteers are responsible for locating anything that may need to be cleaned or repaired in their neighborhood. Volunteers over 18 years of age take full responsibility for planning and executing City Corps' projects, and, in the process, develop leadership, management, and organizational skills. They witness firsthand their ability to make a difference. City Corps' volunteers are also linked to paid work opportunities in the city, such as setting up for festivals. Gorre says City Corps' volunteers are inserted "in every aspect of community life." As such, they learn about the needs of their city, but also about the positive opportunities available to them and a clearer picture of the possibilities the future may hold for them. Gorre believes that most of the youth in the program do not typically fare well in school and are not often recognized for their work. City Corps validates and rewards the youth's hard work through links to paid employment, write-ups in the City Corps' newsletter, and access to City Council meetings.

In addition to providing opportunities for youth development and supporting and encouraging youth development, Gorre credits City Corps with improving the community's view of young people. When City

Corps began, Gorre says community members were suspicious of youth. Indeed, some community members called the police when they saw young people out on the streets, assuming the youth were going to cause trouble. Now that community members can see the physical improvements in their neighborhoods, such as reduced litter and repaired potholes, they have begun to act more positively towards the youth. Instead of calling the police, community members now thank the youth and share water and food with them while they conduct their work.

For more information: <http://citycorps.org/>

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The California Endowment is a private, statewide health foundation created in 1996 with a mission to expand access to affordable, quality health care for underserved individuals and communities, and to promote fundamental improvements in the health status of all Californians.

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