



The California Cities Gang Prevention Network

Welcome to the 12th bulletin of the California Cities Gang Prevention Network! In addition to updating you about the October meeting of city leads, we spotlight the work of Cora Tomalinas, a community leader who has mobilized San Jose's community around gang prevention.

CCGPN Website

The California Cities Gang Prevention Network website is up and running! On it you will find past copies of the bulletins, Network publications, as well as helpful links on gang prevention policy, gang violence, and examples from successful approaches from member cities. Visit the website at <http://www.ccgpn.org/>.

Meeting of the City Points

This year's meeting of the city leads of the California Cities Gang Prevention Network was held on October 29 and 30 in Berkeley, CA. The meeting was attended by the 13 city points and additional city team members, as well as representatives from The California Wellness Foundation, The California Endowment, and Paul Seave, Director of the Governor's Office on Gang and Youth Violence Policy.

The meeting came at a critically important time as all cities face lowered budgets and changing priorities. City leaders emphasized maximizing governmental relationships in the face of changing personnel and effective approaches to fiscal responsibility over the course of the two-day conference.

The conference kicked off with a welcome from Jack Calhoun and introductions and updates from city points and conference participants. Many cities reported large budget deficits and changing priorities that require cut backs on programming and staffing. A theme throughout the conference, however, was turning challenges into opportunities (e.g. using budget constraints to ensure efficiency and capitalizing on heightened public financial awareness to institute a fast). Despite news of financial hardship, city points consistently emphasized the strong moral motivation for gang prevention work. Commander Iida's story about a school-aged child in Salinas who refused to draw using a blue crayon because he was already conscious of that color's gang implications was a particularly poignant reminder of why gang prevention work is important to California cities.

Azim Khamisa, Chairman, CEO, and Founder of the Tariq Khamisa Foundation, delivered a keynote speech that energized the room with its call for forgiveness in the face of the worst of tragedies. Rather than seek retribution for the killing of his son Tariq by a 14-year old gang member named Tony, Khamisa realized that the culprit of his son's murder was the culture of violence. Following his son's death he threw himself into understanding why children join gangs and concluded that they do so for the most elemental of human desires: safety, belonging, and love. He realized that in any violent crime, "there are victims on both sides of the gun" and that the only way to reach both victims is by educating youth in nonviolent practices. This realization

prompted him to take the amazing step of forgiving his son's murderer, Tony. Azim reached out to Tony's grandfather and they now work together to share their message of nonviolence to school-aged children through the Tariq Khamisa Foundation.

After a standing ovation to Dr. Azim Khamisa's speech, Mayor Dennis Donohue presented his vision for a state-wide fast against gang violence which shared Khamisa's belief that by changing individual behavior, we can change social norms. Following his session, representatives from Fresno, San Francisco, and Sacramento presented their cities' anti-gang public service messages.

Conference participants then had the opportunity to discuss challenges and opportunities facing them with regards to inter-governmental, especially city-county, relations. Some cities shared their stories of tight knit city-county working relationships; in San Jose, the Chief Probation Officer sits on the Mayor's Gang Prevention Task Force and even helps review applications by community-based organizations for city funding. Some cities struggle with this partnership and are not able to take the best advantages of available resources. Suggestions to improve inter-governmental collaboration included:

- Focusing on individual relationships;
- Maximizing resources that are already available;
- Defining problems with data so that they are clearly understood and; suggestions for solutions can be most objectively evaluated;
- Forming teams of city-county workers (e.g. police and child protection workers);
- Communicating to city and county leaders that the problem faced is bigger than politics.

The first day of the conference closed with dinner where conference participants had the opportunity to find out more about Oakland's street outreach work. The outreach workers, who are typically on the street

late at night to interrupt or prevent gang violence, include both former gang members and concerned citizens. They spoke passionately and movingly about their commitment to be a positive force for youth in their communities and to reduce gang violence.

Day two began with a presentation from Rev. Jeff Carr, who urged city leaders to look for new opportunities and to use resources creatively in this time of financial stress. Cities now have the opportunity to look closely at funded programs and support the activities that really help youth in their communities, and to cut those that do not. Following an update by Dr. Angela Wolf on NCCD's street outreach research and on its process evaluation of the California Cities Gang Prevention Network, Andy Moore led a brainstorming session on the future direction of the Network. Conference participants were given the opportunity to rank and discuss potential Network priorities. City leaders expressed their commitment to the continuation of the Network, and agreed that the Network should prioritize hosting topical regional or statewide training sessions and advocating for policy change at the state and national level. Suggested training topics included street outreach, maximizing city-county relationships, girls in gangs, and the role of the faith community in gang prevention work. The conference closed with a final wrap-up in which conference participants and organizers expressed their enthusiasm for and commitment to the work that lies ahead.

In a conference evaluation survey, the majority of participants stated that the conference sessions were excellent and very relevant to their work. Respondents found the street outreach presentation to be particularly helpful and were excited to take the program back to their cities. Suggestions for topics of future meetings include: gangs and employment, the new administration and youth violence policy, and the role of parks and recreation in gang prevention work.

Reminder to conference participants: If you haven't yet, please fill out and return the conference evaluation survey to Fabiana Silva.

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Community Involvement and the Gang Problem: Profile of San Jose Community Organizer Cora Tomalinas

Despite her recent media exposure as a recipient of the 2007 California Wellness Foundation Peace Prize, Cora Tomalinas is very clear that her strength is not personally driven but drawn from the people who make up San Jose's community. "When they listen to me at City Hall, it's not me [they're listening to], I'm the mouth of the community," she says. Cora Tomalinas is a community organizer who, with a passion to temper gang violence, takes the concerns of her neighbors, friends, church members, and acquaintances to City Hall. Her commitment and success with marrying community concerns and public policy have made her a central force in the formation and work of San Jose's Mayor's Gang Prevention Task Force.

Cora Tomalinas believes that the solution to gang problems is for communities and cities to work together toward a common goal. She considers gangs a symptom of a sick society that all segments must work together to heal. According to Tomalinas, "[The] gang problem [stems] from all the other problems." "It's not us and them," she says, "Gang members are all ours." She cites socio-economic difficulties, problems with the family, mental health challenges, the growing gap between rich and poor, and the mortgage crisis as just a few of the many issues that lead youth to join gangs. Because these problems are so broad and multi-faceted, she believes it takes a broad and multi-faceted solution to solve them.

Cora Tomalinas' experience as a mother whose daughter was involved in drugs and alcohol in the 1980s as well as her subsequent involvement in community and government initiatives has informed her vision of what an effective strategy against gang violence should look like: a true partnership between community members, government, police, community, and faith-based organizations. "Some gang problems, police can solve; other gang problems, it's better for the community to deal with." She cites San Jose's gang crisis line as an articulation of this principle. Whenever there is a gang-related crisis that requires an immediate response, community members can call the crisis line to report it. The crisis intervention team then decides the most appropriate response, from police intervention to community outreach.

Enacting the kind of gang prevention strategy that Cora recommends requires strong involvement and support from the community. When asked how to get community members more involved in gang prevention, Cora advises cities to simply ask the community to become involved. She stresses that people would want to be involved in policy formation if cities let them know that their voices matter. "Get them to community meetings and try to show them that their involvement is valuable no matter how small." To community members, she suggests: "It doesn't matter if you're uncomfortable with public speaking or if you're uncomfortable with the language. If you are a mommy, daddy, sister, or brother, you can speak from the heart about what gang violence has done to your family and your community. Your voice must be heard." If community involvement is not initially strong even after officials reach out, Tomalinas urges cities to "keep trying because the community needs time to trust [cities]." There is always a risk to individuals' personal safety when involved in gang prevention work. Trust between community members and city leadership is essential to success.

San Jose's recent completion of its new strategic plan illustrates Tomalinas' ideal of community-city partnership. Cora, along with other members of the Gang Task Force knocked on doors around San Jose to urge community residents to attend town hall meetings and discuss the area's gang problem. She, the Task Force, the Mayor, and members of City Council attended all the city's town hall meetings and shared the community's concerns with community crime prevention specialists who then translated those ideas into a first draft of the strategic plan. This draft was then edited by the Gang Task Force and community organizations. Tomalinas says, "We did the best we could to get the community involved [...] that's all I could ask for."

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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.

Created in 1992 as an independent, private foundation, TCWF's mission is to improve the health of the people of California by making grants for health promotion, wellness education, and disease prevention.

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