



The California Cities Gang Prevention Network

The 4th Annual City Leads Meeting

With the generous sponsorship of the California Wellness Foundation, the fourth annual city leads meeting of the California Cities Gang Prevention Network (the Network, or CCGPN) took place on October 19, 2010, in Hollywood, California, in conjunction with the Foundation's annual Conference on Violence Prevention and presentation of the California Peace Prize. At least two team leaders from each of the Network's 13 cities attended this year's leads meeting to strengthen their prevention efforts and discuss projected 2011 work. Several outside resource persons leavened the meeting with comments and observations. They included Thomas Abt, Chief of Staff at the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs; Billie Weiss, Associate Director of the Southern California Injury Prevention Research Center at the UCLA School of Public Health; Rachael Davis, Managing Director at the Prevention Institute and project director of UNITY (Urban Networks to Increase Thriving Youth); and representatives from the UNITY cities.

Reports and discussions at the meeting illustrated the Network's great strides in its violence reduction efforts, the interaction among Network cities, and growing access to expert knowledge and broader partnerships. Network staff will integrate information from the meeting into a best practice summary on prevention; this information will also influence customized technical assistance for sites in 2011. Overall, the conference brought participants up to date on emerging federal policy, the status and impact of cities' comprehensive action plans, the Network's plans for 2011, and strategies to deepen and strengthen local prevention efforts.

High-ranking Justice Official Cites the Network as the Spur for the White House's Forum to Prevent Youth Violence

Thomas Abt, Chief of Staff at the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs, recognized the Network as the inspiration for the White House's development of the national Forum to Prevent Youth Violence (the Forum). The Forum, in a manner similar to the Network, provides context for participating localities—including San Jose and Salinas, two Network cities—to share challenges and promising strategies to combat youth violence. Echoing Attorney General Holder's keynote address to the Network in May, Mr. Abt stressed the role of the Network as a partner for the White House initiative. In addition to serving as a model for the Forum, the Network's pioneering violence reduction strategies provide the White House with insight on the perspective of local governing bodies, local police departments, and local community and faith-based organizations to develop the best methods to support local efforts. Mr. Abt emphasized the deep commitment of the White House to supporting violence prevention work based on comprehensive strategies that blend prevention, intervention, enforcement, and reentry. He reminded the Network that it could use its voice to push Congress to finance prevention programs more adequately, by demonstrating that prevention programs are cost-effective. He termed this "making the business case to the Hill."

The Network's Resilience in Hard Times

Many Network cities have faced and continue to face drastic cuts in staffing, services, and funding. Despite these challenges, the cities have made progress in implementing a comprehensive gang violence prevention strategy. Indeed, the current economic and political climate has provided cities with opportunity and incentive to use Network resources and their comprehensive plans. Oakland, for example, has found its comprehensive plan valuable for acquiring grants, such as an OJJDP Second Chance Juvenile Reentry award and a Second Chance Adult Reentry award, to fund activities anticipated in the plan. Salinas has drawn support from Network leaders in San Jose to assist Salinas with community mobilization, and with engaging county officials in the development and implementation of a comprehensive action plan.

National Prevention Expert Commends and Challenges the Network

Billie Weiss, Associate Director of the Southern California Injury Prevention Research Center at the UCLA School of Public Health and an expert on violence prevention, provided Network cities with feedback after hearing cities' updates on recent progress and challenges in violence prevention. Ms. Weiss applauded the Network for its resilience and creativity in its cross-city and cross-agency collaboration and coordination, its advocacy work with policy makers, its ingenuity in developing alternative funding resources for prevention work (e.g., local tax measures), and its impact in decreasing violence and homicide rates.

As a way to strengthen and extend the Network cities' efforts, Ms. Weiss suggested that cities incorporate intimate partner and domestic violence efforts into prevention strategies as a long-term means to lessen childhood trauma, gang involvement, and gang violence. Moreover, Ms. Weiss noted, if the Network wants to see its current violence efforts have enduring effects on cities, all cities should consider addressing issues in the built and social environment, such as neighborhood beautification, creation of safe spaces, and active living, as well as local and state gun policy.

The Network's 2011 Goals

Dr. Angela Wolf, Senior Researcher at the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD), introduced the Network's proposed goals for 2011:

1. Anchoring the Network approach in at least 10 of the 13 Network cities;
2. Providing customized and intensive technical assistance to these cities; and
3. Mobilizing the Network to influence state and federal policy.

The 2011 goals emerged from a process evaluation of Network activities to date, regular Network teleconference calls, and recent Network conferences. To achieve these goals, the partners—NCCD and the National League of Cities Institute (NLC)—will work closely with 10 “core” cities, drawn from its current 13, which have demonstrated capacity and clear commitment to the implementation of a comprehensive action plan. These core cities will receive technical assistance (TA) for the “anchoring,” or sustainable implementation, of their comprehensive plans. This TA will support cities in several areas:

- Increasing community engagement for cities' comprehensive action efforts;
- Deepening cities' prevention strategies;
- Growing cities' capacity to collect, share, and analyze data across service sectors (e.g., law enforcement, health, and schools);
- Assisting cities in developing additional funding resources;
- Strengthening local reentry efforts;
- Assisting cities in gaining maximum visibility for their comprehensive action efforts; and
- Expanding the Network's ability to inform legislation and policy.

The Network's Policy Priorities and Next Steps

For the policy portion of the gathering, city leaders divided into federal, state, and local policy discussion groups under the moderation of Jack A. Calhoun, Senior Consultant, NLC Institute for Youth, Education, and Families. Each group generated lists of ideas as to next steps and priorities for each policy arena. From the parallel discussions, two priorities for policy efforts by the Network emerged:

- Ensuring long-term support for violence prevention strategies that are comprehensive, innovative, and inclusive of the communities most affected by violence. City councils, and legislative bodies at the state and federal levels, should expect and provide support to maintain comprehensive violence reduction plans. As a related matter, cities with vibrant, sustained plans and strong partnerships should receive priority for state and federal funding.
- Maintaining and expanding existing funding sources for youth violence prevention and reduction. As a means to this end, city leads suggested that the Network should support cities in demonstrating the cost-effectiveness of prevention. As a practical objective at the state level, city leads recommended that the state continue the functions of the Governor's Office of Gang and Youth Violence Policy, as well as the CalGRIP funding that has flowed to cities from this office. They suggested that the Network brief California's new governor on CalGRIP's effectiveness and successes. At the federal level, city leads suggested that the Network push for "de-siloing," or the development of a gang and youth violence prevention grant program financed by multiple federal agencies and made available only to cities that have viable, comprehensive action plans.

Incorporating Prevention Strategies More Fully Into Cities' Comprehensive Efforts

Despite the challenges of incorporating prevention into comprehensive plans, some Network cities have demonstrated success. Oakland, San Jose, and San Diego shared with fellow Network cities how each has financed and continued prevention initiatives. For instance,

Oakland acquired funding for its parent education classes on gang awareness through Measure Y, a local tax measure. San Jose financially supports its community centers by splitting costs of its community centers with local nonprofits. The city of San Jose funds the maintenance of community buildings and offers these as free office space to existing nonprofits. The city saves money by not paying for the provision of social services to the community, and the nonprofits save money on rent. San Jose's city council approved this approach when staff explained the contributions of prevention and intervention efforts to reducing the city's crime rates. San Diego, for its part, has mobilized existing agencies and resources as a strategy to move its youth employment program forward. San Diego acquired the support of a city council member, a local community college, and ex-gang members to support youth in preparing for and entering local health industry jobs.

Watch for the forthcoming Network best practice summary on prevention.

The Network and UNITY Connection

Expanded participation in the California Wellness Foundation conference afforded an opportunity for a first-time joint introductory meeting of the Network and several representatives of UNITY. UNITY, convened by the Prevention Institute and supported by the Wellness Foundation as well as the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, is a network designed to strengthen and support cities in preventing violence before it occurs and to help sustain these efforts. The joint introductory session in Los Angeles brought out commonalities in the violence reduction initiatives of the Network and UNITY, and established a foundation for future joint efforts on policy. Representatives of UNITY cities shared overviews of their prevention strategies. Chicago reported on efforts to bring together all city agencies with a youth-related mission to coordinate violence reduction efforts. Minneapolis described a 40% drop in violent crime that stems in part from a four-point effort set out in a Blueprint: connecting each young person with a trusted adult; intervening at the first sign of trouble; restoring to full community engagement those who have spent time in the criminal justice system; and deglamorizing violence through a public service campaign.

Seattle is working with youth expelled from middle schools because of violent acts, and providing them with employment, recreation activities, and case management.

The California Peace Prize and the California Wellness Foundation's Conference on Violence Prevention

On the evening of October 19 and during the following day, Network city leads participated in the Wellness Foundation's Peace Prize Ceremony and Conference on Violence Prevention. The Wellness Foundation conference reinforced the importance of strengthening preventive strategies in city comprehensive plans and actions, and positioning violence prevention as a long-term investment in the safety and stability of children and families. The conference also afforded the Network several prominent opportunities to share findings from its work with representatives of cities and programs from across California and the nation.

- Jack Calhoun moderated the opening panel, "Exploring State and Federal Policies That Would Support Violence Prevention Work on the Local Level," in which Angel Rios Jr., a Network city lead from San Jose, drew attention to the need for state and federal collaboration. Dr. James A. Mercy, Acting Associate Director for the Division of Violence Prevention at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, described three reasons why public health must play a significant role in tackling violence reduction: violence makes us sick; violence blocks us from healthy living; and violence makes us unequal.
- Andrew Moore, Senior Fellow at NLC's Institute for Youth, Education, and Families, moderated the panel "The Comprehensive Approach to Preventing Gang Violence: The Promise and the Challenge," in which city leads from Fresno, Oxnard, Salinas, San Bernardino, and Santa Rosa discussed how their respective comprehensive plans contribute to reducing gang violence.
- Dr. Barry Krisberg, Distinguished Senior Fellow and Lecturer in Residence at the Berkeley Center

for Criminal Justice and retired NCCD President, presented as part of the "Safe and Successful Reentry Strategies" panel. Dr. Krisberg stressed the need for reentry strategies that intertwine community voices, innovation, and best practices.

- Dr. Angela Wolf discussed the importance of community-based participatory action research in evaluations in the panel "The Problem With Evaluation: Practitioners, Policymakers, and Evaluators Speaking Openly and Honestly About the Evaluation Process." As part of this panel, Guillermo Cespedes, Network city lead for Los Angeles, described the recent evaluation experience of the Mayor's Office of Gang Reduction and Youth Development.

The National League of Cities' Institute for Youth, Education and Families (YEF Institute), in partnership with NCCD, launched the California Cities Gang Prevention Network to reduce gang violence and victimization, mortality and morbidity, and to develop a statewide policy agenda to abet promising local efforts. NCCD is devoted to developing criminal and juvenile justice strategies that are fair, humane, economically sound, and effective. The YEF Institute helps municipal leaders take action on behalf of children, youth, and families.

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