



**PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY
YOUTH & GANG TASKFORCE
REPORT 2009**

YOUTH AND GANG TASKFORCE



Youth and Gang Violence Taskforce

In late spring 2008, the Prince George's County Council established the Youth and Gang Violence Task Force (CR-25-2008) to review and evaluate the County's violence prevention programs and make recommendations to ensure a well-coordinated and systematic violence prevention effort in the County. This effort was motivated by the need to evaluate County progress on the Joint County Gang Prevention Task Force 2004 recommendations and implementation, and by several troubling gang-related homicides involving teens in the County.



Progress, including the establishment of a County gang unit and Office of Youth Strategies, has occurred as a result of the 2004 Task Force. Even so, Prince George's County law enforcement officials have reported an increase in violent, well-organized gang activities similar to what is happening in other jurisdictions in the Washington Metropolitan region. Prince George's County police officials report that as of June 1, 2007, more than 1,800 identified and documented gang members and their associates, along with an estimated 250 existing gangs or crews of various sizes were throughout the County. Gang presence has been identified in the middle and high schools, and the Department of Corrections has reported an increase in gang violence within the county jail as well. Due to the complexity of this issue, efforts within the entire community are needed to reduce gang activity.

Rather than target increasing law enforcement and suppression tactics within the County, the Youth and Gang Violence Task Force has chosen to focus entirely on prevention and intervention strategies to ensure the "root causes" of violence are addressed. To those ends, the Task Force made 23 recommendations, including the need to immediately establish a Steering Committee to help the county coordinate gang prevention and intervention efforts. The Task Force also found that the following elements would be critical to reducing youth and gang violence in the County:

1. We must acknowledge the presence of gangs in our communities and complement suppression strategies with prevention and intervention strategies.
2. The combined leadership of the criminal justice system and community-based organizations must focus on mobilizing political and community resources to address gang problems.
3. County leaders must create a mechanism or structure to coordinate community-wide efforts. This effort must include a team comprising representatives from law enforcement, prosecutors, judges, probation, corrections, schools, community-based and faith-based organizations, grassroots agencies, and other groups.

Background and Methodology

The Youth and Gang Violence Prevention Task Force was established by legislation, Council Resolution-25-2008. In addition, CR-25-2008 established the Task Force membership composition, and mandated that the Task Force produce a report for presentation to the County Council. The Task Force officially met bi-weekly from July 2008 through November 2008 to review and analyze research data, solicit community input, and formulate recommendations. Guest speakers from the County Police Department Gang Unit, prior gang members, and the Prince George's County Youth Commission addressed the Task Force meetings.

At the outset, the Chairman informed the Task Force of the history of the issue and the purpose for the group being assembled. The discussion then centered on identifying the scope of work for the Task Force. The consensus of the Task Force was to focus primarily on prevention and intervention. A two-step approach for reducing gang-related activity detailed in the Federal "Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's (OJJDP) Comprehensive Gang Model" 2008 report became the model for the creation of two Subcommittees; Subcommittee #1: Evaluation/ Best Practices Enhancing Collaboration/ Needs Assessment; and Subcommittee #2: Campaign/System for Identifying At-Risk Youth and Families.

The Task Force used a variety of strategies and techniques to collect and analyze information including discussions with community leaders to better understand



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the complexity of their issues and interests. County Government department and agency representatives presented information on their department/agency's role in the community effort and detailed how their respective departments can better serve County youth. Further, a self-assessment survey was completed by each representative describing their department/agency's current outreach efforts and present ability to serve at-risk youth. The Maryland-National Capital Park & Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) provided demographic data pertaining to the availability of services to the at-risk population in the County. This data combined with the Prince George's County Police Gang Unit's experience provided concrete suggestions to target the County's overall outreach effort. A thorough review and discussion of this information resulted in the formulation of recommendations and action steps described in this report. The full Task Force reviewed the recommendations of the subcommittees, developed the framework

for recommendations, and prepared the final report.

Overall Recommendations

The Task Force proposed the following three overall recommendations:

1. Implement a comprehensive gang model in the County as described by OJJDP, which includes the following key strategies: community mobilization and awareness; collaboration and coordination; education, training, and employment programs; social intervention; and targeted gang enforcement and prosecution.
2. Develop and implement policies and procedures that result in the most effective use of available and potential resources within and across agencies and non-governmental organizations, to better address the gang problem.
3. Continue to provide programs and resources across the county and target additional resources (prevention and/or intervention as well as suppression activities) to established communities in the county with the greatest incidence of youth and gang violence such as Langley Park; Bladensburg/Riverdale; Kentlands/Palmer Park; and Temple Hills/Suitland.

The following additional recommendations are divided by priority.

Within the next 6 months:

4. Establish a standing steering committee

to ensure coordination and close collaboration among agencies and nonprofits.

- The committee will be responsible for recommending policy and reviewing activities of the County's Gang Initiative; enhancing interagency and organizational collaboration; and continuing to assess gang activity.
 - The committee should minimally meet at least quarterly and members should be trained and oriented regarding subject matter.
 - Members should minimally represent the following organizations/agencies: law enforcement, corrections, probation/parole (juvenile and adult), schools, social service agencies, faith-based organizations, the County Council, County Executive, employment programs, NAACP, University of Maryland Department of Criminology and community leaders and individuals who are either from upper-level county agency management or have influence with their community.
 - Report to County Council and County Executive bi-annually on accomplishments and activities.
5. Establish a gang coordinator with cabinet/executive-level tasking authority with a dedicated budget to implement programs.
 6. In targeted communities where gang incidents and youth violence are prevalent, immediately begin the following:

- Identify key programs/needs for targeted areas such as parenting skills programs; in school and after school prevention and education programs; education, training, and job opportunity strategies; and social and economic opportunities. For example, in Fall 2008 the Department of Youth and Family Services partnered with the Latin American Youth Center to coordinate an evidence-based gang intervention and prevention program at High Point High School, Northwestern High School, Langley Park-McCormick Elementary School, William Wirt Middle School and Buck Lodge Middle School.

- Strengthen the current Prince George's County Public Schools process (p-team) for identifying and addressing youth at risk for gang involvement. The system should be in place in the elementary, middle, and high schools and should be connected with services provided.

- Involve local residents, municipal leaders, civic associations, religious institutions in strategies.

- Encourage key organizations located in the target area to make needed services and facilities available to gang youth and youth at high risk of gang involvement.

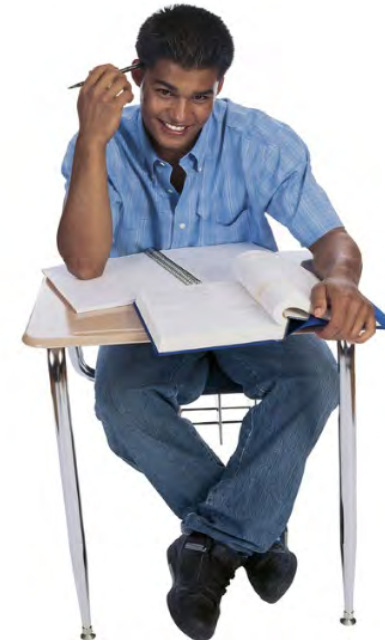
- Create local groups in targeted areas to coordinate activities and share information.

eventually. Additional activities may vary depending on the population targeted.

7. Establish a gang outreach presentation and outreach team(s) to immediately start systematically reaching out to residents through schools, churches, civic associations, and other community groups. The team should include a member of the Prince George's County Police Gang Unit, as well as a member of the Office of Youth Strategies and Programs and/or another agency/organization capable of sharing information on youth programs in the county. Materials should be distributed in English and Spanish including A Parent's Quick Reference Card: Recognizing and Preventing Gang Involvement. A minimum goal of 25 presentations a year should be set with a priority on targeted communities and early in the school year. It is essential that residents and parents know how to identify gangs, but also about the existing programs available for youth.

8. Re-establish the "tip line" for the reporting of suspected gang activity, graffiti or tagging and other occurrences of suspicious activity 1-888-844-GANG (4264). Explore other avenues to increase communication with police including text messaging, which may be less obvious.

9. Devise an awareness campaign for the anonymous 24-hour help line for youth – 1-800-422-0009. The county established a 24-hour hotline for youth, but additional marketing would be helpful.



10. Expand Youth Opportunity Centers and other similar programs in the County. Currently, the county jointly operates the Crossroads Youth Opportunity Center in Langley/Takoma Park with Montgomery County.

- The Kentlands HUB Recreation Center opened as a pilot-program in the Fall of 2008. Services provided should include, but are not limited to: employment training and referral services; counseling and referral services; English for Speakers of other Languages (ESOL); case management services; recreational and leisure activities; leadership and social skills development; academic support.

- Evaluate the need for additional centers/HUBs elsewhere in the County.

Additional Recommendations

(beyond the first six months)

11. Solidify new research and program development partnerships and continue to develop additional partnerships. Throughout task force meetings, several members made commitments. Below are some of the partnerships established:

- University of Maryland Department of Criminology agreed to partner with the Office of Youth Strategies and Programs to assist with community violence mapping and data collection and to provide interns to anti-gang initiatives

- End Time Harvest Ministries and University of Maryland agreed to work together to survey students at Bladensburg High School to help collect additional information on student attitudes, experiences, and evaluate program success.

12. Enhance Research. It is clear that there is a need to address youth violence. However, more information is needed to evaluate programs and ensure that the programs are effective at reaching the correct targeted populations and that gaps in services are identified. The task force recommends:

- Using the surveys provided in the OJJDP June 2002 A Guide to Assessing Your Community's Youth Gang Problem to better understand the issues confronting

Note: These services/tools would also be expanded beyond the targeted areas

the County's youth. Surveyed populations should include students, gang members and community or parent leaders.

- Conduct a needs assessment in conjunction with M-NCPPC to survey needs, interests and desired services.
- Review national best practices for prevention and intervention and evaluate, if appropriate, for the County.
- Ensure that a mix of proven prevention and intervention programs are provided in communities with the highest rates of violence.
- Investigate the underlying demographic factors that affect local gang problems.
- Evaluate the provision of culturally appropriate and bi-lingual services.

13. Inventory activities and resources. Currently, the Office of Youth Strategies and Programs in conjunction with M-NCPPC publishes a youth services directory. This inventory needs to be expanded to include non-profit organizations with youth programs and expand to be available electronically in a searchable format.

- The OJJDP June 2002 A Guide to Assessing Your Community's Youth Gang Problem includes a survey to inventory the programs.
- Target mailings on youth programs and other information on preventing youth violence to households with children under 18 and use internet resources to reach youth. MNCPPC has the capacity to target mailings.

14. Enhance remedial/technical educational programs, employment training and entry-level employment opportunities in communities with high incidence of gang-related crimes and membership.

15. Establish a case management system and associated data system so that contacts and services by all members of the intervention team can be monitored for purposes of effective targeting, tracking youth entry into and exit from the program, and measuring outcomes at individual and program area levels.

16. Continue, evaluate, and strengthen Character Education programs in the Prince George's County Public Schools.

17. Maintain and expand existing after-school programs during the critical hours of 2:00-6:00 pm. See the Appendix for a list of current programs. Enhance after-school programs in targeted areas by keeping schools open for recreation and enhancing partnerships between M-NCPPC and non-profits to provide leisure and youth services. Perhaps, partner with Department of Social Services to create "street teams" to engage youth.

18. Expand safe haven resources for youth seeking refuge from gangs.

19. Start-up the Safe Place program. Safe Place is the first step to help for any youth in crisis or at risk. This community collaborative program, operated by youth shelters or youth

serving agencies make it possible for any youth to access help at locations including fast food restaurants, convenience stores, fire stations, libraries and county buses which display the Safe Place sign. Safe Place connects youth to immediate help and safety and offers supportive services to both youth and their families.

20. Continue to expand Prince George's County Public School initiatives including positive behavioral interventions and supports; alternative to suspension/expulsion initiatives; staff development on gang awareness; truancy prevention initiatives; mentoring programs; school-based resource officers; and school-based counseling.

21. Identify and encourage additional mentoring and recreational programs including expansion of Scouting, Volunteer Fire Departments, Police/Law Enforcement, Prince George's County Police Department Police Athletic League to targeted communities with high gang activity and minimal recreational opportunities.

22. Partner with allies to create a promotional campaign to reach youth.

23. Funding: Focus county grants and discretionary spending where possible on youth services and gang prevention and intervention programs. Seek federal and state grants. Partner with the Prince George's Community Foundation and reach out to other foundations in the Washington Metropolitan Area to fund

youth initiatives.

Next Steps/Conclusion

Since 2004, Prince George's County has moved forward, but work remains in our efforts to successfully address the issue of gangs and violence in the County. Gang activity continues to grow locally as well as nationally. There is great need for expanded prevention and intervention programs as well as collaboration among agencies and non-profit partners. The establishment of a steering committee will be critical to moving the work of the Task Force forward, and to enhancing collaboration. Until the Task Force met, many members of the committee rarely had the opportunity to share information with colleagues in other organizations who may be working on the same challenges. Several new partnerships were started thanks to the work of the Task Force, but sustaining this work and collaboration in the long run is critical.

The Task Force believes that implementing the 23 recommendations will significantly impact the lives of young people in the County, and will provide stronger deterrents to the growth of gangs in our communities. We appreciate the support of the County Council and County Executive in our work and look forward to working with the Council and County Executive on implementing these initiatives to benefit our young people.

Together we can strengthen our communities and build stronger, healthier communities.

APPENDIX

The items contained in the Appendix include a summary of materials and information provided to and discussed by the taskforce as well as a summary of the subcommittee meeting discussions. Additional materials given to the taskforce members at their first meeting can be found online at www.princegeorgescountymd.gov/council.

Notes from Prince George's Police Gang Unit Presentation

The Youth and Gang Violence Task Force began its first meeting on July 9, 2008 by hearing from Sgt. George Norris from the Prince George's County Gang Unit. The presentation, which lasted an hour, discussed gang activity in the county. The following is a synopsis of this discussion as well as several graphs produced by the County Police Department on gang activity in the county.

Gang activity in Prince George's County mirrors the increasing presence of gangs throughout the entire country as well as the Washington Metropolitan area. In general, gangs in Prince George's are becoming more influenced by prominent, national gangs from other states. Gang members and their activity are not confined to jurisdictional boundaries. Gangs operating within the County include members reflecting all races, both genders, and various income levels. Some members are joining at a younger age than has been seen in the past.

There is a growing presence of Latino gangs in the County, however; in general the police have been extremely successful in identifying suspects in a large number of violent crimes due to intelligence on the gang members and their activities. This vigilance is critical to managing the gang presence. The most active Latino gangs in our county are Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13), Vatos Locos (VL) and Sureno 13 (SUR-13). These gangs can be found predominantly in the northern part of the county, particularly Langley Park, Hyattsville, Riverdale, and Bladensburg, but gang membership is rapidly expanding into other areas of the County.

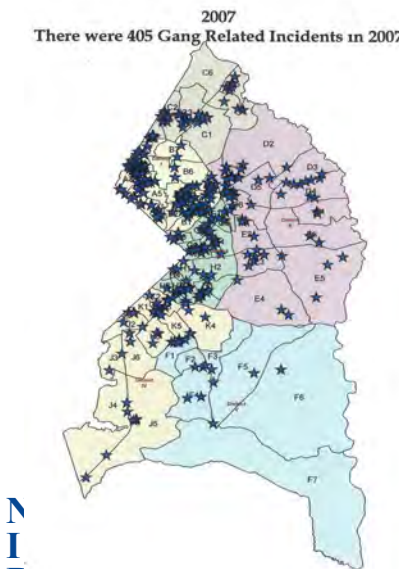
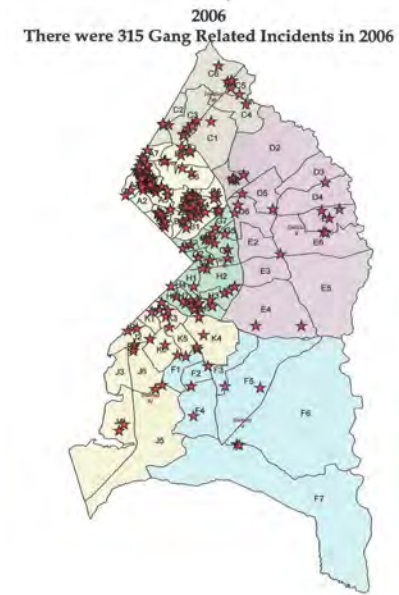
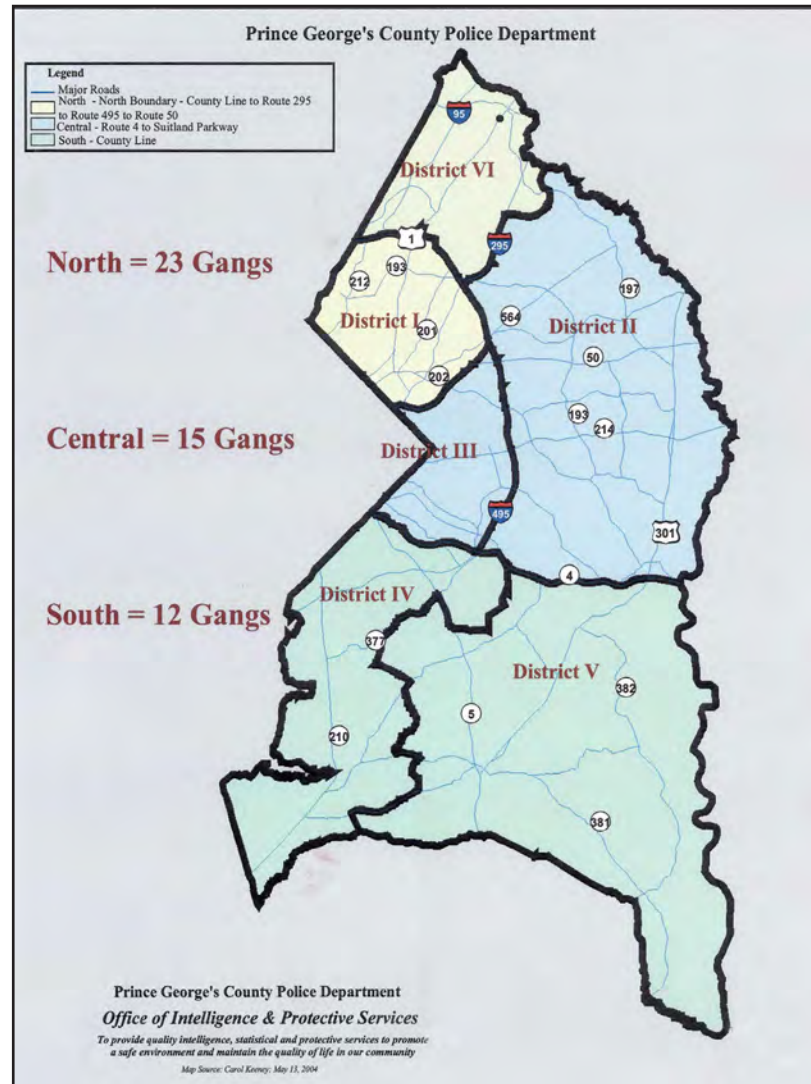
Another challenge is addressing local "crews" or neighborhood gangs, which are named after streets and neighborhoods. There is great concern that neighborhood gangs are starting to form large alliances as seen in other cities such as Los Angeles, which could create greater problems in the future. These neighborhood gangs are also starting to affiliate with the Bloods and Crips, nationally known gangs. Local crews and gangs are heavily involved in drug distribution and robberies, carjackings, auto thefts and first and second degree assaults and homicides.

The Prince George's County Jail has seen a great increase in violence within the jail that is gang related. Consequently, there is a separate gang unit inside the jail to deal with these issues and segregate prisoners as needed.

Gangs are increasing using the Internet as well as My Space pages to share information about their gang. Photos and videos are often placed on My Space pages to share gang initiation as well as gang signs and graffiti. Gang members will often use "skip parties" to attract new members and are recruiting younger and younger members.

There are many reasons why people join gangs, but in the gang unit's experience, the main reason is that something is missing at home. The work by the gang unit, which mainly focuses on suppression, is important, but it is not the solution—a focus on prevention and intervention is essential and prevention efforts, in particular, should be geared toward 5th and 6th graders.

The graphs and statistics provided below give a snapshot of gang activity in the County, but the current statistics may underestimate gang activity because often crimes are not recognized initially as gang-related and consequently are not tracked as such. Gang members are involved from minor crimes—burglary and vandalism—to major crimes such as homicides, rapes, and carjackings.



Subcommittee I of the Youth and Gang Violence Prevention Task Force met twice over the course of the summer—July 24, 2008 and August 7, 2008—to discuss the 2004 Task Force recommendations and the County's progress as well as suggest additional best practices and data collection methods. Members of the taskforce included:

Council Member Eric Olson, Chairman, Youth & Gang Violence Prevention Task Force

Verjeana Jacobs, Chair, Board of Education

Hanno Petras, University of Maryland, Department of Criminal Justice

Michael Butler, Office of Youth Strategies & Programs

Ray Johnson, Department of Corrections

Michael Summers, States Attorney's Office

Gordon Barrow, Health Department

Kelli Beavers, Maryland-National Capitol Park & Planning Commission

Rev. Gail Addison, End Time Harvest Ministries

Bonita Williams, Office of the County Executive

Dr. Judy DuBose, Department of Family Services

The comments from this subcommittee formed the foundation for the task force

recommendations. The subcommittee reviewed each of the 2004 Task Force Report recommendations: General, Prevention and Intervention recommendations. The members considered the current status of each recommendation and offered suggestions to further enhance and or implement the recommendations. Below are the 2004 Task Force recommendations followed by comments:

2004 Task Force General Recommendations

(1) Establish a Joint County Gang Prevention Steering Committee. There were a few follow-up meetings when the report was first issued. There needs to be a quarterly steering committee with members who are trained/oriented regarding the subject matter.

(2) Establish a coordinating entity. Office of Youth Strategies & Programs is the coordinating entity created by the 2004 Task Force. They have a staff of ten, which includes Crossroads staff. However, there should be more staff to help maintain the website, enter data, and go out into the community. The University of Maryland task force member volunteered the services of the schools interns.

(3) General Assembly Action. One law was passed; however, more effort needs to be placed on enforcement of existing laws and identifying current legal

tools; i.e. truancy. An agenda needs to be created with our delegation that focuses on resources and funding. Recommendations should be presented to key stakeholders when finalized.

(4) Inventory of Resources. Increased distribution of resources is needed. Perhaps, purchase mailing lists by age and mail directly to households in an effort to obtain information. Also, there is a need to work with schools in order to receive raw data. Throughout the meeting, there were references for the need to have more data. Data collection will also be essential to soliciting additional funds. Also, resources need to be in at-risk areas.

(5) Public Relations Campaign. This will be discussed under subcommittee II. Establishing a partnership with Comcast was suggested as well as the need to target multiple audiences.

(6) Research and Program Development Partnerships. Involve school board members in program development and University of Maryland interns to help Office of Youth Strategies and Programs. UMD also mentioned that they might be able to assist with community violence mapping and data collection. Bladensburg High School currently uses End Time Harvest Ministries program as a model and End Time offered to survey students with their program to help with raw data collection. OJJDP in June 2002 published "A Guide to Assessing Your Community's

Youth Gang Problem," which is a blueprint for obtaining critical information. See <http://www.iir.com/nygc/acgp/assessment/assessment.pdf>.

The Office of Youth Strategies and Programs' function is to manage and control youth violence and gang activity in Prince George's County through effective implementation of prevention and intervention strategies. Working under one umbrella, the goal is to implement a collaborative effort to better service the needs of the youth in Prince George's County. The Office of Youth Strategies and Programs provides outreach, guidance and support to government, faith-based and nonprofit organizations that provide services to children, youth and families. They promote and participate in a wide array of community meetings and programs, which plan and offer services to children and youth to ensure their safety and well being.

Prevention Recommendations:

(1) School Safety assessment. Staff will find out if a school safety assessment has been done.

(2) After school programs. Current program needs to be expanded and evaluated. (How many served, demographics, and tools to measure outcome). M-NCPPC currently has a request out for a Needs Assessment survey (needs, interest

and desired services by demographic). M-NCPPC representative indicated that she would like to work with Task Force in preparing the request.

(3) Community meetings and survey for outreach. Establish "gang outreach presentation" that can be individually tailored. Presentation should include gang unit but also other partners. Presentations can be given in the community, via PTA, community groups, churches especially at the beginning of school.

There was an overall suggestion that specific targeted programs/audiences should be identified and included.

Intervention Recommendations:

(1) Standardized information collection. Office of Youth Strategies currently developed the Youth Services Directory to provide information on community, government and non-government organizations in Prince George's County, Maryland. The Directory was compiled to create greater awareness of County's services, encourage interagency cooperation, and provide greater access to services. The Directory is available on line at <http://www.goprincegeorgescounty.com/OfficeofYouthStrategiesandPrograms/princegeorgescounty.com/Government/BoardsCommissions/OYSP>

It was also suggested that 24-hour hot

lines be advertised in schools. Hotlines were established 9 months ago to connect residents to counselors.

(2) Design and implement a joint county program. Crossroads Youth Opportunity Center: The Langley/Takoma Crossroads Youth Opportunity Center (YOC) site serves as the liaison between Prince George's and Montgomery Counties Health and Human services, Law Enforcement, Government, local agencies, businesses, inter-faith base organizations and non-profit organizations. This initiative will monitor and track services and programs. The Center brings together services for our community's most vulnerable youth. It is a place where youth have the opportunity not only to make positive choices, but also to be supported as they work toward those choices. The subcommittee discussed the possibility of expanding this Center elsewhere.

The Maryland Regional Gang Initiative (MRGI) will be a multi-agency project within the County as well as the coordinated effort and commitment of governmental entities and community-based organizations.

Prince George's County has received a sub recipient award from Montgomery County in the amount of \$980,730; for the coordination and implementation of services to support the parties' work in prevention, intervention and suppression of gangs and gang-related activities. The County has designated Prince George's County, Office of Youth Strategies and

Programs as the lead agency, to provide the overall project management of these discretionary Federal grants monies.

The following will provide a summary and justification of budget elements proposed in support of the Maryland Regional Gang Initiative (MRGI): The dollar amount of the Maryland Regional Gang Initiative was \$1,974,460 awarded 8/28/2006 to Montgomery County to be split between Montgomery County and Prince George's County. Prince George's County award amount is \$980,728.

On February 21, 2008, three Administrative Orders were signed for the Police Department, Department of Social Services and the Sheriff Department.

- The Prince George's County Police Department Police Athletic League (PAL); procure equipment, training, travel and gang enforcement in the amount of \$417,690.
- The Prince George's County Sheriff Department Domestic Violence Campaign; procure materials, brochures, signage and other media related in the amount of \$25,000.
- The Department of Social Services will also provide prevention and intervention services, Safe Haven Program, training, and related personnel in the amount of \$106,043.
- Crossroads Youth Opportunity Center Request for Application (RFA) has been awarded to a vendor to provide

and expand services provided to the Crossroads in the amount of \$200,000. The CYOC has provided services to date for approximately 300 youth and their families residing in the Takoma Park/Langley Park areas. Services provided by the CYOC include, but are not limited to: employment training and referral services; behavioral health assessments, counseling and referral services; English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes; case management services; income support; recreational and leisure activities; leadership and social skills development; and academic supports.

- Community-Based Programs Request For Application (RFA) have been awarded to a vendor to provide prevention and intervention services to the community in the amount of \$150,000 This component will include employment, training and diversion activities designed to provide active gang members with positive alternatives and avenues to avoid illegal activity.
- The Office of Youth Strategies and Programs funding is being utilized to develop a media campaign, two intervention contract positions and transportation costs for youth in support of the MGRI \$70,528

(3) Anonymous tip line. Police department "First Steps" youth 24 hours help

(4) Actively participates with Council of Governments. Group did not see this as a critical recommendation.

(5) Provide assistance to municipalities. Need to reach out more to municipalities to assist community groups. Discussion of need for peer intervention programs.

(6) Safe Haven resources. Need more money for safe haven. It's very expensive to relocate and provide drug treatment. Need to identify funding for safe haven.

(7) Remedial/Technical Educational programs. Discussed existing vocational programs within the school system and the need to enhance. Discussed the Carpenter's Union seeking students for job skill training. Life skills are a part of workforce. There is a need to target more female programs. Prince George's Connection offers parenting skills. Should also be added as a prevention mechanism.

Notes from Subcommittee II: Creating a Campaign and System for Identifying at Risk Kids

Subcommittee II of the Youth and Gang Violence Prevention Task Force met twice over the course of the summer—July 28, 2008 and August 14, 2008 to discuss the creation of a coordinated county-wide campaign and discuss systems for

identifying at risk kids. Members of the taskforce included:

Councilmember Will Campos, *Vice-Chair, Youth & Gang Violence Prevention Task Force*

Ms. Karyn Lynch, *Department of Social Services*

Mr. Emory Waters, *Prince George's County Public Schools*

Major Robert Liberati, *Prince George's County Police Department*

Acting Lt. Sharon Saunders, *Prince George's County Office of the Sheriff*

Delegate Justin Ross, *Maryland House of Delegates*

Mr. Jerry Adams, *Human Services Coalition*

Mr. Joseph Emmerich, *The Chillum Youth Project*

Mr. Tony Best

Ms. Lori Kaplan, *Latin American Youth Center*

Mr. Ricardo Flores, *Latin American Youth Center*

Mr. Eric Watson, *Stop Youth Violence*

Mr. Jerrod Mustaf, *Take Charge Program*

Mr. Anthony Murrill, *X2REP, Inc.*

Ms. Devette Brabson, *Christian Hope Ministries*

Ms. Venus Drummond, *Parent Liaison*

Campaign

The subcommittee recommended that a campaign needed to be initiated with multiple partners including religious institutions, schools, fraternities and sororities. The audience would be parents, kids, and current gang members. Multiple forms of media should be utilized including website, music, PSAs and ads. In particular a CD could be produced with music, poetry, art from area youth and producing the CD could be part of a county-wide contest.

The subcommittee discussed the importance of directing an anti-violence campaign to elementary schools and not just middle or high schools. This way you target children before they have any impressions of gangs. This also helps to combat some information that elementary school children are now receiving that promotes and glorifies gangs.

In addition to promoting an anti-violence message, a communication strategy should be sure to include a way of informing children of the positive activities that are out there for them to participate in. Specifically, there is a need to connect children with activities that might be of interest to them that are run by Park and Planning.

Regarding the need to have a campaign in Spanish, this is only essential for parents. Children from bilingual households speak English and therefore do not need translation.

The first step toward moving this project forward would be to establish a focus group run by someone with experience in developing public relations messages. This focus group would look to find out exactly what kinds of messages children of different age groups are most receptive to. At the same time, this focus group would also determine the method of communication most suitable to different age groups. It is also likely that a different message and mode of communication might be more relevant depending on the ethnicity of the target audience.

Systems for Identifying At-Risk Kids

Discussions by the subcommittee indicated that several agencies, including the Prince George's County school are developing systems for tracking at-risk kids or kids who may already be involved with gangs, but that a more comprehensive, proactive, and systematic approach is needed.

- For instance, the Prince George's County School System is working in fall 2008 to develop a complete list of all students in its schools that are/ may be affiliated with a gang and will be developing taskforces to work with those students.
- The Department of Social Services does not determine at-risk kids, but does react to instances of abuse or work with troubled kids as identified by schools

and police. The Department has been involved in relocating youths who may be involved in a gang, but interested in leaving to other parts of the country. However, funding for this program is minimal and the federal relocation funds are minimal compared to expenses and need.

- The Department of Family Services operates a hotline and a youth counseling hotline is operated by Juvenile Services.
- Individual schools are also working more with non-profits such as End Time Harvest Ministries' Conflict Resolution Center Program to work with students rather than an at-home suspension. In this program, both the youth and their parents, attend multiple meetings on how to resolve conflict.

Some tools are in place to identify youth who are in gangs or who may be more prone to be in gangs. The subcommittee made the following suggestions: 1) Key agencies need to collaborate possibly through a steering committee 2) Discussions need to continue to create a system that helps identify at-risk students earlier and direct them and their parents into preventive programs 3) the school system needs to continue to coordinate its intelligence with the County Police and its gang taskforce as well as other key parties.

Evaluation of Survey and National Best Practices

During the subcommittee and task force meetings, there was a strong desire by members to evaluate the programs in the county and identify evidence-based best practices that the county could consider adopting. A small survey was designed to obtain additional information from various partners on the work being completed. A chart containing this information follows. The steering committee may take the responsibility of circulating the survey. Many nonprofits, religious groups as well as county agencies are engaged in activities that help prevent youth violence yet often there is very little information shared. The steering committee would help collect this information with the Office of Youth Programs.

A smaller team including the Police Department, and Office of Youth Programs was pulled together at a later date to focus on national best practices for prevention and intervention. One of the main focuses of the discussion was ensuring the continuation of the Phoenix curriculum and fine-tuning its implementation. In the summer of 2008, Family Services awarded a grant to the Latin American Youth Center to provide the Phoenix curriculum at several schools in the area—Langley-McCormick Elementary School, Buck Lodge Middle School, High Point High School, and William Wirt Middle School. The Phoenix curriculum is a nationally-

recognized evidence-based best practices program with emphasis on preventing gang violence as well as intervention by working with at-risk youth to provide mentoring and life skills. In essence the “Phoenix” becomes the club rather than the gang. Funding to support the program comes from a one-year grant provided by the State through Family Services. Finding continued funded for this program as well as expanding the program to other communities will be critical in the future. More details on the program can be found at <http://www.gangprograms.com>.

In terms of intervention programs, the group focused on the need to open up additional youth opportunity centers similar to Crossroads and provide funds for specific initiatives. Successful intervention programs require one-on-one counseling and mentoring and often involve relocating a gang member. Funding for this level of intervention is often hard to find. Moreover, intervention programs such as removing tattoos, job placement or youth activities are rarely sufficient on their own for extricating the youth from the gang. It has been determined that a multi-disciplinary, case worker approach is fundamental.

YOUTH & GANG VIOLENCE PREVENTION TASK FORCE MEMBERS

CR-25-2008

**MR. ERIC C. OLSON, CHAIR
YOUTH & GANG VIOLENCE
PREVENTION TASK FORCE**
2ND FLOOR, CAB
14741 GOVERNOR ODEN BOWIE DRIVE
UPPER MARLBORO, MD 20772
LEGISLATIVE AIDE: Dannielle Glaros
eolson@co.pg.md.us
dmglaros@co.pg.md.us
(w)301-952-3060

**MR. WILL A. CAMPOS, VICE-CHAIR
YOUTH & GANG VIOLENCE
PREVENTION TASK FORCE**
2ND FLOOR, CAB
14741 GOVERNOR ODEN BOWIE DRIVE
UPPER MARLBORO, MD 20772
LEGISLATIVE AIDE: BRAD FROME
wacampos@co.pg.md.us
bwfrome@co.pg.md.us
(w)301-952-4436

**MS. BONITA WILLIAMS,
COUNTY EXECUTIVE OFFICE**
5TH FLOOR, CAB
14741 GOVERNOR ODEN BOWIE DRIVE
UPPER MARLBORO, MD 20772
bjwilliams@co.pg.md.us
seeames@co.pg.md.us
ALT: SEAN EAMES
301-952-4136

**MAJOR ROBERT LIBERATI
COUNTY POLICE DEPT.
PATROL ENFORCEMENT DIVISION**
7600 BARLOWE ROAD
LANDOVER, MD 20785

rvliberati@co.pg.md.us
ATL: CPT. REX BARRETT
301-772-4885 (C) 240-832-9857

**ACTING/LT. SHARON SAUNDERS
COUNTY OFFICE OF THE SHERIFF**
1601 MCCORMICK DRIVE
LARGO, MD 20774
swsaunders@co.pg.md.us
301-883-7011/240-508-7595

**MR. RONNIE GATHERS, DIRECTOR
M-NCPPC
DEPT. OF PARKS & RECREATION**
6600 KENILWORTH AVENUE
RIVERDALE, MD 20737
Ronnie.gathers@pgparks.com
SEC: ELAINE GREEN
Elaine.green@pgparks.com
301-699-2582

**MR. LAMONT KINNEY
COUNTY YOUTH COMMISSION**
5908 ARAPAHOE TERRACE
OXON HILL, MD 20745
zkinney@cci.edu
301-839-0151/703-248-8887

**MR. MICHAEL BUTLER
OFFICE OF YOUTH STRATEGIES &
PROGRAMS**
425 BRIGHTSEAT ROAD
LANDOVER, MD 20785
SEC: MS. WILLIE CLEMENTS
wmclements@co.pg.md.us
301-316-7822

**MR. EMORY WATERS, INTERIM DIRECTOR
COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
DEPT. OF SECURITY**

SASSCER ADMINISTRATION BLDG.
14201 SCHOOL LANE
UPPER MARLBORO, MD 20772
SEC: SHARON NICHOLSON
snichols@pgcps.org
301-499-7000

**MR. GLENN IVEY, STATES ATTORNEY
COUNTY COURTHOUSE, RM #M3403**

STATES ATTORNEY OFFICE
14735 MAIN STREET
UPPER MARLBORO, MD 20772
SEC: LORI CAMPBELL
ALT: MICHAEL SUMMERS
lmcampbell@co.pg.md.us
301-952-3031

**MS. MARY LOU MCDONOUGH,
ACTING DIRECTOR
DEPT. OF CORRECTIONS**

13400 DILLE DRIVE
UPPER MARLBORO, MD 20772
ALT: MR. GREGORY HARRIS
mlmcdonough@co.pg.md.us
SEC: REBECCA CHANEY
301-952-7015

**MR. GORDON BARROW, SPECIAL ASSISTANT
COUNTY HEALTH DEPT.**

1701 MCCORMICK DRIVE, SUITE 200
LARGO, MD 20774
gabarow@co.pg.md.us
301-883-7847

**PROFESSOR HANNO PETRAS
DEPT. OF CRIMINOLOGY &
CRIMINAL JUSTICE
UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND**

2220 LEFRAK HALL
COLLEGE PARK, MD 20742
hpetras@crim.umd.edu
301-405-4699

**DR. JUDY DUBOSE
COUNTY DEPT. OF FAMILY SERVICES**

6420 ALLENTOWN ROAD
CAMP SPRINGS, MD 20748
ALT: DEBORAH MCBROOM
jdubose@co.pg.md.us
301-265-8446

**MS. KARYN T. LYNCH, DIRECTOR
COUNTY DEPT. OF SOCIAL SERVICES**

805 BRIGHTSEAT ROAD
LANDOVER, MD 20785
CARLIECE LEE
ktlynch@co.pg.md.us
301-909-7010

**MS. VERJEANA M. JACOBS. CHAIR
COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION**

SASSCER ADMINISTRATION BLDG.
14201 SCHOOL LANE
UPPER MARLBORO, MD 20772
SEC: JACQUELYN BROWN
ALT: DR. JUDITH JAMES
Judith.james@pgcps.org
jacquelyn.brown@pgcps.org
301-952-6308

**DELEGATE JUSTIN ROSS
MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES**

6 BLADEN STREET, ROOM 151
ANNAPOLIS, MD 20401
LEGISLATIVE DIR: RYAN DUFFY-
240-687-3748
Justin.ross@house.state.md.us

**MR. ERIC WATSON
STOP YOUTH VIOLENCE**

8200 TEMPLE HILLS ROAD

TEMPLE HILLS, MD 20748
ewatson@usaid.gov
240-832-6188

**MR. JERROD MUSTAF, VICE PRESIDENT
TAKE CHARGE PROGRAM
JUVENILE DIVERSION PROGRAM,
INC.**

7610 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE, STE. 200
FORESTVILLE, MD 20747
jerrod.mustaf@takechargeprogram.org
301-420-7395

MR. TONY BEST

12208 QUICK FOX LANE
BOWIE, MD 20720-4321
tonymbest@aol.com
301-213-8239

**MR. ANTHONY MURRILL, FOUNDER
X2REP, INC.**

9003 GOLDFIELD PLACE
CLINTON, MD 20735
X2repinc@yahoo.com
301-343-7161

**MRS. DEVETTE BRABSON
CHRISTIAN HOPE MINISTRIES**

8001 ORCHARD PARK WAY
BOWIE, MD 20715
ALT: BLANCA KLING
devetteb@gmail.com
240-845-0388 ext. 126/c 301-996-8710

DERRICK PARKS

50001 FORBES BLVD., STE 200
LANHAM, MD 20706
Leema5@aol.com
240-375-3050

**MS. LORI KAPLAN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
LATIN AMERICAN YOUTH CENTER**

6200 SHERIDAN STREET
RIVERDALE, MD 20737
lori@layc-dc.org
ricardo@layc-dc.org
ALT: RICARDO FLORES
202-319-8642/301-434-4892

**REVEREND GAIL A. ADDISON
END TIME HARVEST MINISTRIES**

P.O. BOX 524
RIVERDALE, MD 20738
ethmaddison@comcast.net
301-345-7548

**MS. VENUS DRUMMOND, PARENT LIAISON
DREW FREEMAN MIDDLE SCHOOL**

2600 BROOKS DRIVE
SUITLAND, MD 20746
301-817-0900/240-460-4325
venus.drummond@pgcps.org

**MR. JOSEPH EMMERICH, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
THE CHILLUM YOUTH PROJECT, INC.**

P. O. BOX 57
5325 GALLATIN STREET
HYATTSVILLE, MD 20781
ALT: JERRY ADAMS -301-925-7050
301-641-1217/301-641-5819
Jemm42@verizon.net

PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY YOUTH AND GANG TASK FORCE REPORT
PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY COUNCIL
14741 GOVERNOR ODEN BOWIE DRIVE
SECOND FLOOR
UPPER MARLBORO, MARYLAND 20772
www.princegeorgescountymd.gov/Council