

WHITE PAPER

NEVADA'S YOUTH GANGS

February, 1991

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for the youth of Nevada



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"My homeboys, they are my family! We care about each other...we're always there for each other. Even when nobody else is there for you, your homeboys are always there for you. Yeah, the gang is the best family you could have."

-- Gato, age 15

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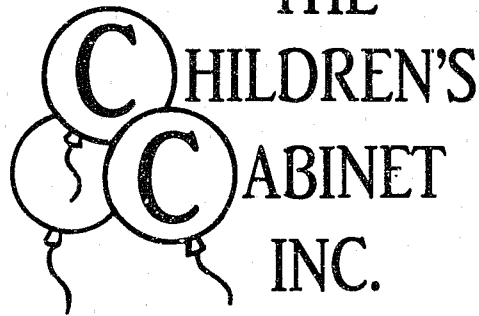
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A child and family resource center created by a public and private partnership of community volunteers serving Washoe County.



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February, 1991

The Board of Trustees of the Children's Cabinet, Inc., presents this White Paper on Youth Gangs to Nevada's communities in an effort to provide a "status report" on the developing youth gang problem in Nevada and provide a series of recommendations to combat this increasingly difficult situation.

The White Paper was developed by the Children's Cabinet Institute, a "Think Tank" for programs and ideas to benefit children and families in Nevada. The White Paper Committee, composed of several members of the Cabinet's Board of Trustees, staff, and Institute, was established in the Fall of 1990, to research the problem of youth gangs in Nevada and recommend possible solutions to the Board of Trustees.

The ideas and recommendations contained in this document have a state-wide focus, although everyone recognizes that the level of the problem is decidedly different in Las Vegas, Reno, and the balance of the state. While a specific recommendation may not be applicable in a given area of the state, the problem of youth gangs is spreading rapidly and all of Nevada's counties must be concerned about this alarming trend.

We urge every community in Nevada to carefully review the White Paper and plan an effective response to this very real threat to our state's economic stability and the quality of life of our residents.

We welcome your involvement in solving the problem.

Michael C. Dermody
Chairman, Board of Trustees

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*A "Think Tank" for programs and ideas
to benefit children and families in Nevada.*

Forward

The Children's Cabinet Institute is pleased to present this White Paper on Youth Gangs to the Board of Trustees of the Children's Cabinet, Inc.

The White Paper Committee, appointed by the Board of Trustees and Institute, worked for several months to gather and analyze data, review reports from neighboring states, and finally, develop a comprehensive and integrated response for Nevada. The Committee received much encouragement from other communities who stated by the time their state had recognized the issue of youth gangs, the problem was deeply entrenched and very difficult to remedy.

The White Paper Committee agreed on a philosophical approach to the problem of youth gangs in Nevada:

- ** Early intervention, prevention and diversion of at-risk youth and families is the most effective strategy for controlling criminal activity among youth.
- ** The appropriate responsibility of government and community-based agencies is to support and strengthen families, not substitute for them, as family-oriented solutions have the highest potential for success.
- ** Decentralized, neighborhood-based solutions that empower families where they live, within their own cultures, are most effective.
- ** An effective response to growing youth gang activity in Nevada will be comprehensive, integrated, and balanced between prevention and enforcement efforts.

The White Paper documents identified trends in Nevada which are contributing to the proliferation of criminal activity by youth gang members. The report then categorizes its recommendations for various sectors of the community including community-based organizations,

schools, business, local government, the judiciary, legislative, and executive branches, juvenile probation and parole, law enforcement, corrections, and the media.

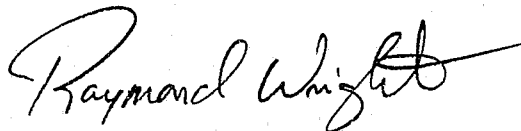
Working with family problems is expensive, difficult, and requires the commitment of the entire community. Traditionally, Nevada has targeted its resources to provide aggressive law enforcement and punishment through incarceration. But too many of our youth are turning to gangs for support, income, and "family".

As Los Angeles County law enforcement authorities have discovered, allocating scarce resources only to increased law enforcement activities will not defeat youth gang violence or criminal activity. In a recent statement, Los Angeles County Sheriff Block said, "We need social programs. They are absolutely essential. As long as gang cultures exist, we are chasing our tails. Law enforcement cannot break the cycle, only social improvements can break it."

The proposals presented in the White Paper are comprehensive and costly. However, the problem of youth gangs is complex and directly related to family dysfunction, underemployment, lack of affordable housing, diminishing resources for child care and youth programs, drug dealing, and increasingly alienated minority communities.

An effective response to the threat of increased criminal activity by youth gangs in our state requires the collaboration and coordination of all sectors, public and private, to meet the challenge. Nevada has not conceded our cities to youth gangs; it is still possible to "turn the tide" against their proliferation.

On behalf of the White Paper Committee, I would like to thank the Board of Trustees for this opportunity to raise public awareness of Nevada's youth gangs and present solutions that will enable our state to strengthen families and protect our most valuable resource: our children.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Raymond Wright". The signature is fluid and stylized, with a large initial 'R' and a long, sweeping underline.

Raymond Wright
Chairman, Children's Cabinet Institute

**"I guess nothing would change my race.
They call me 'dirty Mexican, beaner, greaser'
and things like that.
I thought I was being punished for being born a
Mexican.
But my homeboys, we're all brothers.
We respect each other.
We take care of each other."**

-- Wizard, age 14

Summary of Data and Trends

Who are Nevada's Youth Gangs?

Defining youth gangs has been a tremendous problem in Nevada, as many citizens rightfully point out that a "gang" can be nothing more than a social club or loosely knit group of friends. However, the White Paper Committee has defined gangs more specifically for the purposes of making recommendations to reduce violence and criminal activity among Nevada's youth. Our definition of a gang is as follows:

A gang is a group of people that form an allegiance for a common purpose and engage in unlawful or criminal behavior.

No one knows exactly how many youth gang members there are in Nevada, nor the exact relationship between specific groups and their involvement in criminal activities. However, urban and rural areas of the state have documented increasing youth gang activity over the past several years.

Clark County Juvenile Court estimates there are approximately 6,000 gang members in the Las Vegas area, while more than 250 Washoe County youth are known to be affiliated with youth gangs. Rural areas have documented a much smaller number of gang members, but certain cities, (Fallon, Carson City), have noted a definite trend upward for the past several years.¹

For the most part, Nevada's gangs can be categorized in the following manner:

1. Black Gangs: The two prominent black gangs are the Crips and the Bloods, two gangs which originated in Southern California who can be identified by the red and blue "colors" they wear. They are rival gangs, often involved in drug dealing, burglaries and street violence. Crips and Bloods are more predominant in Southern Nevada, where there are 21 different sets of Crips and 11 sets of Bloods. The Crips outnumber the Bloods by a ratio of 4 to 1. Members of these gangs have been identified in Northern Nevada as well.
2. Hispanic Gangs: Hispanic gangs are prevalent in Nevada, evolving from a traditional street gang structure into a modern-day turf-oriented/neighborhood-based street "family". Hispanic youth

gang members are exceedingly loyal and committed to the gang. They are also often involved in burglaries and street violence, and to a lesser degree, in drug dealing. There are at least 11 different Hispanic gangs in Southern Nevada, and more than 8 in Reno. Carson City has at least 26 Hispanic gang members.

3. White Gangs: Nevada's white youth gangs tend to be racially-motivated or drug-abusing "stoner" groups. Stoners are often very involved in the Heavy Metal music scene, and occasionally practice Satanic worship. Perhaps the most notorious white gang in Nevada are the "Skinheads", who have racist and non-racist sects, but are very violent and often involved in hate crimes against minorities. The practice of the occult and/or Satanism may also be present. Clark County has documented at least 8 chapters of White Gangs, while the Skinheads have been well publicized in Northern Nevada due to the drive-by murder of a Black man in 1988.
4. Asian Gangs: Fewer Asian youth are involved in gangs in Nevada than other groups, but as the number of Asian residents grow, youth gangs can be expected to surface in greater numbers. Asian gang members are harder to identify as they do not have a particular dress code. They can be exceedingly violent, and often prey upon their own culture. Southern Nevada officials estimate there are 5-8 different Asian gangs in their area.
5. Native American Gangs - Northern Nevada officials have noted the presence of at least one loosely-formed Native American youth gang on a local reservation. This gang does not currently recruit outside of its ethnic heritage, however.
6. Multi-racial youth gangs: Nevada is experiencing a significant trend towards integrated youth gangs, whose members may be a mix of White, Hispanic, Black, Asian, and Native American youth. These gangs tend to be neighborhood-based in poor communities where family dysfunction is prevalent.

It should be noted that these basic classifications are general descriptions, and not intended to cover every youth gang in Nevada. Also, there are varying degrees of association and affiliation with youth gangs. Many individual youths who are linked to gangs do not adopt

criminal behaviors, but are more concerned with typical teenage pastimes of cruising, parties, and attracting members of the opposite sex.

Why Are Nevada's Youth Joining Gangs?

"I don't know. I tell him you have to go to school.
I tell him you have to stay out of trouble and do good.
But when I go to work he goes out with the gang.
Sometimes he doesn't come home and I worry that he is in trouble. But, I have to go to work."

-- Mother of a 14 year old gang member

While it is impossible to fully document the extent of youth gangs in Nevada, we do know that our youth have become involved in gangs for a variety of reasons, including economic, environmental, social, cultural and psychological factors.

Many youth who join gangs come from families that live below the poverty line. More than 39,000 Nevada children, (15.2%), live in poverty, and many view gang membership as a source of income from activities such as drug dealing, robbery, extortion etc.²

Many times these youth come from families with single heads of households, primarily mothers. Nevada has the second highest rate of mothers in the workforce, 71.1%. Only the District of Columbia ranks higher at 72.1%.³

Nevada also has one of the highest percentages of children living in single-parent families, 26%.⁴ Often single parents are forced to work several jobs to make ends meet, and the lack of supervision and companionship drive youth to the streets to become part of a "family".

The environmental factors of a low-income neighborhood where adult supervision is lax, coupled with a child's need for belonging and direction make gang membership very attractive. Gangs often have very strict codes and sanctions that youth must adhere to, and many youth find the structure, identity and "protection" a gang offers to be a comforting factor in their lives.

The social ties and lifestyles youth gangs offer become more influential than their families as a youth becomes more and more involved. Young children view older gang youth as the norm in their neighborhood and aspire to join the gang which they see as a "cool" and enviable relationship.

What Do Youth Gang Members Do?

"My mom, they turned off her electricity...the lights and everything. She cooked our dinner in the backyard. My mom couldn't handle it when my dad left. She had to sell things to support us. I could see that she was having a bad time. But still, she would never give up. Me and my brother started stealing things. We stole food and candy. We used to test ourselves and see how good we were in stealing and we started getting caught a few times."

-- Angel, age 16

Youth gang activity is difficult to define as many gang activities are frequently shared by a large portion of society. Many gangs function as "social clubs", providing members with a norm for how to dress, behave, and interact socially. Illegal activities are what distinguish the youth gangs studied in this White Paper. These criminal acts often involve illegal drugs, burglary rings, prostitution, and crimes against a person or property.

However, gang members involved in even typical activities have a potential for violence and criminal activity which is far greater than for any other group of people. Their most serious threat to society is due to this inherent violence associated with their activities. Chance meetings between rival gangs can end with serious injury to innocent non-gang victims.

There is no way for Nevada citizens to completely shield themselves from this violence; as youth gangs expand their territory, street violence will extend more and more often to shopping malls, downtown areas, and other public places.

Youth gang members take great pride in their neighborhood and "homeboys". They are loyal and protective of each other, providing total acceptance of their co-members. Criminal activities increase the gang's cohesiveness and perpetuate their identity.

Street gangs seek recognition through verbal and non-verbal communication, such as the use of graffiti and hand signs. Clothing styles and tattoos are also used to clearly give the community the message that a particular gang member is committed to his neighborhood and turf.

Gang activity on school campuses in Nevada has greatly increased during the past few years, especially in Southern Nevada, where the 1990 school year opened with an on-campus

murder. Graffiti and vandalism occur at random and intimidation of teachers is on the rise.

Violent youth gang activity is also increasing in our urban areas. Juvenile probation departments have seen a trend toward more serious crime, and Nevada is now sending chronic and serious offenders out-of-state to programs equipped to handle them.

What Can We Expect In The Future?

During the Committee's review of current data from a variety of sources, the following trends were identified in our state which can be expected to greatly impact the youth gang situation during the next five years.

Population Growth: Preliminary figures from the 1990 census document Nevada as the fastest growing state with a 50.7% increase in population during the past 10 years from 800,000 residents to 1.2 million.⁵ Much of the growth has been an influx of residents from Southern California, with youth gang members included in the immigration. 25.1% of Nevada's population is under the age of 18. 18.9% of the population is minority and 82.6% is metropolitan.⁶

There is a growing number of undocumented workers in Nevada, who migrate to our state in search of entry-level, semi-skilled employment. Many of these families are not eligible for public programs due to their undocumented status. Immigration rarely deports even criminal offenders.

Juvenile Crime: There is a trend in Nevada toward more serious juvenile crime. In Washoe and Clark Counties, there has been a "leveling-off" of juvenile crime since 1986. However, the percentage of drug, property, and crimes against persons has risen dramatically while less serious offenses such as runaways, truancy, incorrigibility ("status offenses") have decreased.⁷

Nevada has the highest ranking in the nation for juvenile incarceration, with 40.7 incarcerations per 10,000 juveniles in 1988. The 1979 rate was documented as 27.7 per 10,000.⁸

Children At-Risk: There is much data to document increasing numbers of Nevada's children who find themselves at-risk of living in poverty, with poor

health, in need of affordable child care, and at-risk of child abuse or neglect, substance abuse, teen pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and teen suicide. Neither urban nor rural Nevada communities have sufficient resources to meet the demands for services.

- * Nevada ranked 40th in the nation in 1987 for providing early prenatal care with 26.8% of Nevada's infants born to pregnant women who did not begin prenatal care in the first three months of pregnancy.⁹ By 1989, the proportion of women who did not receive early prenatal care increased to 29.3%.¹⁰
- * Nevada ranked 22nd in infant mortality in 1987 with 9.6 deaths per 1,000 live births,¹¹ in 1989, the infant mortality rate dropped to 8.2.¹² However, the infant mortality rate among blacks in 1989 was 19.1 per 1,000.¹³ In 1988, the infant mortality rate among teen pregnancies was 11 per 1,000 live births and an astonishing 36.2 per 1,000 for black teens.¹⁴
- * Nevada ranked 38th for teen births in 1986; for every 1,000 women, ages 15-19, 58.4 give birth.¹⁵ In 1987, babies born to Nevada teenagers accounted for 11.5% of all live births in our state; by 1988, that percentage had risen to 12.5%.¹⁶ 65% of all teen births in Nevada occur in Southern Nevada.¹⁷
- * Nevada ranks 42nd in the nation in terms of Aid to Dependent Children, with the maximum grant per family just \$ 330 a month; the average fair market rent is \$ 616.¹⁸ In Clark County, nearly one out of five ADC recipients are adolescents.¹⁹
- * A recent national poll documented that over 50% of working mothers are unable to find satisfactory child care while they are on the job.²⁰ Nevada has just one independent Resource and Referral program to assist parents in finding and evaluating child care for their children, yet national predictions indicate a majority of mothers giving birth are now going into the labor force by their child's first birthday.
- * In 1987, 43 Nevada youths under the age of 25 took their own lives.²¹ Experts say many youth suicides are improperly categorized as "accidents," and the actual number may be three times the reported rate. The 1988 youth suicide rate was 19.6 suicides per 100,000.²²

* In 1967, there were 22 reports of child abuse and neglect in Nevada.²³ In 1987, there were a total of 7,533 reports and more than one-half of these reports were substantiated. By 1989, the number of reports state-wide increased to 11,017, of which 4,712 were substantiated.²⁴

Education: Nevada has experienced high rates of high school drop-outs and illiteracy, especially among the minority populations. In 1987, Nevada ranked 31st in the nation for its High School Graduation rate, an improvement from a ranking of 40th in 1982.²⁵

In terms of providing adequate state investment for early childhood education, Nevada ranks last in the nation, as we provide no state revenues to supplement federal Head Start funds or for financing our own state preschool education program. In 1985, only 7.5 of every 100 eligible poor children, ages 3-5, were enrolled in a Nevada Head Start program.²⁶

Lack of Affordable Housing: Many parts of the state have experienced a shortage of affordable housing during the past several years, including rural areas of Nevada which are experiencing a mining boom. Many youth gangs are centered around low-income housing projects and neighborhoods where many youth are unsupervised by parents working multiple jobs to make ends meet. Hispanic families, in particular, often "double up" in housing, creating crowded living conditions which encourage youth to migrate to the street.

Nevada ranks 49th in the nation in affordability of housing for the poor.²⁷ Only Hawaii and the District of Columbia received poorer marks.

A survey conducted in September of 1988 documented 1,539 homeless youth in Nevada - nearly 1% of the state's school-age population.²⁸ 60% of the homeless youth lived in Clark County, 22% in Washoe County, and 17% in the balance of the state.

A UNLV study found that Las Vegas ranked 7th among 60 cities surveyed on the number of homeless per 1,000 central city population. It is estimated that over 900 homeless children attend Southern Nevada schools plus an unknown but large number who do not attend school at all.²⁹

Multiple-problem Families: Anecdotal data from a number of youth-serving public and private agencies in Nevada reveal that children and families seeking assistance exhibit more problems, of a more severe nature, than ever before. The 1989 legislative session voted to create the first Children's Resources Bureaus in Las Vegas and Reno, specifically to work on diagnosis and case planning for these multi-problem families.

While the trend data is not encouraging, Nevada's youth gang problem has not yet developed into a "no-win" situation as experienced by other Western cities, such as Los Angeles or, to a lesser degree, Portland or the Bay Area. Officials in these cities are quick to point out the same trends were present in their communities prior to youth gangs "taking over" parts of their cities.

A prominent business official in Las Vegas recently stated that the two most pressing problems facing that city are youth gangs and air pollution, and of the two, youth gangs are probably more of a threat to a healthy business climate.

The message is clear: Nevada must do something now if we are to prevent more and more of our youth from becoming involved in criminal youth gang activities as a substitute for family attention, love, and support.

"You're never gonna stop gangs.

Especially with the Mexicans.

**Maybe 'cause you're never gonna be able to give us
the things we need...like jobs, and a chance to make
things better for ourself and our families."**

-- C.J., age 15

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Community-Based Organizations Recommendations

1. Encourage parental responsibility through establishment of parental support programs to increase awareness of gang problems, including parenting education, gang information "hotlines", parent and youth support groups, and family counseling.
2. Promote the expansion of before- and after-school programs to provide children and youth with supervised activities in their neighborhoods.
3. Encourage and promote prevention and intervention programs utilizing adult and youth role models and mentors to counsel youth.
4. Establish specialized prevention and intervention programs in communities with identified language or cultural needs.
5. Seek support from local businesses and industries for employment training, work experience and placement programs, targeting known gang members as well as potential gang members.
6. Encourage community mobilization and involvement through the development of neighborhood-based groups that work towards "reclaiming" their neighborhoods.
7. Develop pro-active outreach programs to work with youth individually and collectively in their neighborhoods and provide concrete alternatives to gang membership.
8. Collaborate through public-private partnerships to target services to high-risk neighborhoods and address family issues in a comprehensive manner.

School Recommendations

9. Establish a youth gang prevention program, in coordination with other prevention curriculum, designed and implemented by local school districts with assistance from local law enforcement, community and business organizations.

10. Develop a parental youth gang awareness educational program utilizing a multi-disciplinary group of probation officers, teachers, counselors, law enforcement, social workers, and youth advocates to provide neighborhood-based parent training and referral mechanisms.
11. Require and provide training for administrators and teachers to raise awareness of the youth gang problem, identify high-risk youth at a young age, and increase knowledge of referral mechanisms.
12. Establish and enforce codes within Nevada schools to prohibit the display of gang "colors" and the use of pagers or cellular phones on school grounds.
13. In cooperation with local government, state agencies, and community-based groups, expand after-school, weekend and summer youth programs to appeal to broader based groups, especially in the age range of 10-18 years.
14. Utilize a more effective screening tool to improve detection of children in primary grades with physiological or psychological learning disabilities. Coordinate resources within the community to provide effective intervention whenever problems are identified.

Business Recommendations

15. Develop training programs and work experience opportunities for youth, targeting both gang members and potential gang members.
16. Provide funding and in-kind resources to community-based or local government programs working with youth.
17. Utilize employment policies that are supportive of families and advocate for responsive services to meet the needs of Nevada's workers.

Local Government Recommendations

18. Set local government budget priorities to allocate balanced funding to youth gang prevention and enforcement programs.

19. Ensure that local government services are available and accessible to families through extended hours and decentralized locations.
20. Develop a model Office of Neighborhood Services to provide local government/community-based services in neighborhoods of urban centers.

Executive Recommendations

21. Direct the Youth Services Division to establish a statewide clearinghouse of information regarding successful models for prevention, intervention, and community mobilization programs and methods for obtaining funding for such programs.
22. Authorize funding for youth gang programs that emphasize early intervention, prevention and diversion of at-risk youth; are family-oriented; are decentralized and neighborhood-based; and utilize an approach that is comprehensive, integrated and balanced between prevention and enforcement efforts.

Legislative Recommendations

23. Enact legislation to allocate state subsidy dollars through the Youth Services Division using a population-based formula to establish multi-disciplinary programs for youth gang prevention and intervention activities.
24. Enact legislation to mandate that the State Department of Education create a more effective screening tool to improve detection of children in primary grades with physiological or psychological learning disabilities.
25. Enact legislation to subsidize Juvenile Probation Departments through the State Youth Services Division, to establish early identification programs.

Probation and Parole Recommendations

26. Develop neighborhood probation offices to address the needs of high-risk areas.
27. Provide increased structured surveillance for the hardcore youth offender, and increased programming for the less sophisticated gang member.
28. Recruit additional officers, male and female, from a representative cross section of ethnic groups possessing bilingual skills and sensitivity to special language or cultural needs.
29. In conjunction with community businesses and agencies with similar goals, form a job readiness partnership to train and assist youth seeking gainful employment.
30. Develop joint prevention, intervention and treatment programs with community-based youth and family agencies.
31. Provide ongoing training for probation officers regarding local gang trends, issues, and concerns.
32. Develop programs for male and female youth gang members to facilitate positive role modeling whereby youth learn hygiene, presentation skills, and other life skills.
33. Collaborate with school officials to develop an early identification and intervention program targeted to younger children to prevent further escalation of gang involvement.

Law Enforcement Recommendations

34. Establish criminal youth gang enforcement units in local jurisdictions as appropriate, composed of local law enforcement agency personnel, school and university police, juvenile probation and parole officers, assigned on a permanent basis, to share information and coordinate enforcement activities.
35. Consolidate youth gang intelligence gathering through an automated information system accessible by all law enforcement agencies, with safeguards in place to ensure confidentiality and appropriate use of information.

36. Establish a professionally-staffed Community Youth Gang Task Force including representatives of law enforcement, schools, juvenile probation and parole, youth, and community organizations to review local issues and develop alternatives and resources for prevention, education and intervention programs.
37. Recruit additional officers from a representative cross section of ethnic groups, possessing bilingual skills and sensitivity to cultural or language needs.
38. Provide ongoing training and support to field personnel in methods of gang enforcement and community cultural awareness.
39. Notify parents or guardians of their children's gang involvement and utilize appropriate community resources to attempt intervention, involving the child and family whenever possible.
40. Implement neighborhood-based policing programs, to decentralize police services and more effectively serve targeted communities.

Judicial Recommendations

41. Establish, through the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, a youth gang-specific training and education program for Juvenile/Family Court Judges, probation officers, law enforcement and community-based representatives.
42. Support the creation of Family Courts in Las Vegas and Reno and other jurisdictions as appropriate.
43. Ensure that gang offenders who violate their probation or parole are returned to the judge who sentenced them.
44. Explore the feasibility of establishing special night court sessions to offer a convenient time for juvenile offenders to attend court with their parents or guardians.

Corrections Recommendations

45. Build a serious/chronic youth offenders correctional facility in Nevada to more effectively address the issue of "hardcore" youth gang members.
46. Provide correctional officers with ongoing training in youth gang offender supervision, classification and investigative techniques.
47. Coordinate intelligence-gathering activities between youth and adult corrections and enforcement agencies.
48. Enhance youth gang/drug treatment and prevention programs within youth correctional institutions and ensure that such programs are an element of preparation for release on parole.
49. Establish community-based half-way houses for youth gang parolees.
50. Recruit additional youth corrections personnel from a representative cross section of ethnic groups, possessing bilingual skills and sensitivity to cultural or language needs.

Media Recommendations

51. Cover all aspects of the youth gang problem, including the success of intervention and prevention programs.
52. Establish a policy of reporting gang-related incidents that does not glorify the gang culture or attribute acts to any one gang by name.
53. Provide public service announcements and programming to educate the public on gang prevention techniques, parenting responsibilities, and available local resources.

**"We (the gang) are like a family.
We stick together like a family.
We look out for each other."**

-- Beaver, age 19

RECOMMENDATIONS

COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS RECOMMENDATIONS

"The gang is important to me.
I get help when I need it.
I hang around with them all the time...
they make me feel like I belong."

-- Shygirl, age 16

Community-based organizations play a key role in Nevada in providing "front-line" prevention and intervention programs in the neighborhoods most affected by youth gang violence and criminal activity.

Private, non-profit entities serving youth in Nevada should work cooperatively to implement the following recommendations; if community-based groups do not exist in certain areas, community members should consider the feasibility of establishing them to provide an effective link with private and public sectors in the battle against criminal youth gangs.

1. Encourage parental responsibility through establishment of parental support programs to increase awareness of gang problems, including parenting education, gang information "hotlines", parent and youth support groups and family counseling.

Today's parents often feel overwhelmed by the gang and drug activity in their neighborhoods, and feel there is no place to go for help. The community can support such families by providing awareness and guidance to parents through information "hotlines", early identification of at-risk youth, notification of parents, and family counseling. Parent and youth support groups can also be used to share common problems and develop solutions. Services should be provided in convenient, highly-publicized methods, preferably directly in the neighborhoods most affected by youth gang activity.

2. Promote the expansion of before- and after-school programs to provide children and youth with supervised activities in their neighborhoods.

Work cooperatively with local government, state agencies, schools and businesses to expand the

neighborhood options for before- and after-school care for children and youth. Educational and recreational activities can provide a healthy alternative to the street and can promote family intervention through home visits and "family nights". Parental involvement in these programs should be a priority to avoid the role of substituting for the family unit.

3. **Encourage and promote prevention and intervention programs utilizing adult and youth role models and mentors to counsel youth.**

Mentoring programs have had great success in providing at-risk children and youth with guidance and support to meet the challenge of growing up in today's complex society. These role model programs may involve adults or peers who have been successful in business or school who become involved through a "match" with an at-risk youth. Mentoring programs can make a significant difference with individual youth as they provide opportunities for specialized, non-professional attention in an informal, friendly and supportive manner to let youth know someone truly cares about their future.

4. **Establish specialized prevention and intervention programs in communities with identified language or cultural needs.**

Immigrant communities often experience confusion and fear of the dominant culture's public systems, and therefore do not seek assistance. Yet youth from these same communities, (Hispanic and Southeast Asian for example), form youth gangs which prey upon the immigrant community with little fear or reprisal for their actions because their victims seldom report the crimes.

Community-based organizations should respond with programs and staff that are culturally sensitive to immigrant groups with special language and cultural needs through the use of bilingual, multi-cultural staff and communications, and specialized programming.

5. **Seek support from local businesses and industries for employment training, work experience and placement programs, targeting known gang members as well as potential gang members.**

Many at-risk youth do not have the skills to seek a job or maintain meaningful employment. However, programs in other states have shown that local businesses that hire gang members and at-risk youth have been very successful at extricating youth from gang environments and offering them a fair wage for a day's work.

While it is true that these wages cannot compete with income from selling drugs on a large scale, many youth involved in gangs and drugs do not profit at this level and would very willingly turn to honest employment if they were given sufficient support and opportunity. Successful employment opportunities provide camaraderie, guidance and self-esteem to these youth and in return demand responsibility and accountability.

6. **Encourage community mobilization and involvement through the development of neighborhood-based groups that work towards "reclaiming" their neighborhoods.**

Citizens living in gang- and drug- infested neighborhoods need to be mobilized to work together to solve growing crime problems in conjunction with local law enforcement agencies. Law enforcement can educate residents about the nature of gang- and drug-related crimes, how to interpret graffiti, and provide safe methods of reporting suspected criminal activity. Positive interaction between law enforcement and neighborhood residents will promote cooperation which should reduce crime in the neighborhood.

Community-based organizations can play a mobilization role by organizing neighborhoods and encouraging participation in these collaborative efforts.

7. **Develop pro-active outreach programs to work with youth individually and collectively in their neighborhoods and provide concrete alternatives to gang membership.**

Community-based organizations should design and implement outreach programs in affected neighborhoods to work directly with youth to provide positive alternatives to gang membership. Youth advocates can be utilized very effectively to "work the street" and neighborhood, assisting youth with personal, school, and employment problems and encouraging positive behaviors. Outreach program workers must be available during non-

traditional hours and must be willing to spend the bulk of their time working directly in the neighborhoods.

8. **Collaborate through public-private partnerships to target services to high-risk neighborhoods and address family issues in a comprehensive manner.**

Partnerships are an ideal method of marshalling resources to provide services to high-risk neighborhoods through outreach offices, integrated service delivery systems, or joint projects. Community-based organizations are in an ideal position to use their independent "non-turf" settings for neighborhood social functions where families can participate in dances, cultural events, and educational programs.

A major emphasis of programming for youth and families from high-risk neighborhoods is to provide comprehensive services, directly or through an effective referral mechanism, since family problems are often complex and solutions necessitate combined public and private resources.

Public-private partnerships can often attract new resources and use existing resources more effectively. Public employees can work side-by-side with private employees from community-based organizations and volunteers from university and community to form a team approach whereby families receive the most comprehensive and efficient services available.

SCHOOL RECOMMENDATIONS

"I did poorly in school because I couldn't speak English too well. We used to segregate ourselves in school because that's what everybody did. It was expected. Sometimes I would just want to yell at them (teachers)...pay attention to us! We're people too!"

-- Dimples, age 16

Schools provide the focal point for childhood education and can be the most effective mechanism for prevention education. The following recommendations are made to state and local educators to address the increasing problem of youth gangs in Nevada's school system and communities.

9. Establish a youth gang prevention program, in coordination with other prevention curriculum, designed and implemented by local school districts with assistance from local law enforcement, community and business organizations.

Nevada has no statewide curriculum for youth gang prevention. Yet, numerous studies have shown that early anti-gang education is essential to prevent children from affiliating with these negative influences. Local school systems provide the most effective vehicle for administering such programs which should include the teaching of social values, youth gang awareness, and methods for effectively averting youth gang and involvement and drug use.

Exemplary programs have been developed and tested in the Los Angeles area and other communities. Nevada's schools should modify and adopt appropriate programs for their communities in a concerted effort to provide this vital prevention education.

10. Develop a parental youth gang awareness educational program utilizing a multi-disciplinary group of probation officers, teachers, counselors, law enforcement, social workers, and youth advocates to provide neighborhood-based parent training and referral mechanisms.

While parental awareness alone will not resolve the problem of increasing youth involvement in gangs, parents must work closely with school personnel and

other professionals to learn all they can about youth gangs in their communities and resources available to assist families. Parents can be guided by law enforcement, juvenile probation officers, counselors and teachers in methods of controlling and influencing their children's behavior and understanding family communication and dynamics.

Youth and family advocates can intervene when necessary to assist high-risk families in accessing and utilizing public and private services, or, in extreme cases, moving out of gang-infested neighborhoods.

11. **Require and provide training for administrators and teachers to raise awareness of the youth gang problem, identify high-risk youth at a young age, and increase knowledge of referral mechanisms.**

Many of Nevada's school administrators and teachers have not had sufficient experience and training to address youth gang issues as they emerge within our schools and communities. Insignificant symptoms of increased youth gang activity may quickly grow into a very real threat even in our rural communities. Training should be structured to assist educators to become aware of Nevada's youth gang problems, learn early identification techniques, and become aware of available resources.

12. **Establish and enforce codes within Nevada schools to prohibit the display of gang "colors" and the use of pagers or cellular phones on school grounds.**

Local school districts should establish policies to prohibit the wearing of gang colors and the use of pagers or cellular phones on school grounds. If youth gangs are allowed to utilize these intimidation and drug-dealing devices, they gain credibility and notoriety within the school setting. Prohibiting the use of colors and communication devices reinforces the control of administrators and minimizes youth gang influence on the school campus.

13. **In cooperation with local government, state agencies, and community-based groups, expand after-school, weekend and summer youth programs to appeal to broader based groups, especially in the age range of 10-18 years.**

Safe and healthy recreational alternatives are needed to encourage youth to stay out of gangs. Public and private agencies should work in conjunction with the school system to create and expand youth programs to promote a healthy atmosphere for growth, through cultural, educational or sporting activities.

14. Utilize a more effective screening tool to improve detection of children in primary grades with physiological or psychological learning disabilities. Coordinate resources within the community to provide effective intervention whenever problems are identified.

Early testing and identification of physiological or psychological learning disabilities coupled with appropriate counseling and specialized education programs are critical to solving learning disabilities and giving children confidence and self-esteem within the school setting. Home-based teams can be effectively utilized to bring services to the family when transportation, language, or other barriers exist.

BUSINESS RECOMMENDATIONS

"I always feel important when I'm with the guys.
I like being one of the guys they look up to.
They look up to me more now since I got outta Elko.
Anyway, you always know you have somebody to back you
up and that makes you feel good."

-- Puppet, age 17

Nevada business interests have placed a high priority on attracting and locating new business in our state to ensure economic growth that results in job opportunities for our citizens. Increased crime and violence in our cities poses a significant threat to economic development and the future prosperity of our state.

Business must make an investment in Nevada's youth by linking its resources with local governments, community-based organizations, law enforcement agencies and schools in a cooperative effort to decrease the threat of gangs within Nevada.

Our recommendations for Nevada's business and industry sector are as follows:

15. Develop training programs and work experience opportunities for youth, targeting both gang members and potential gang members.

In coordination with existing job training programs, businesses should establish attractive opportunities for youth to earn wages while learning a trade or skill. A successful work experience will encourage and reward youth by providing an income source through lawful means. Increased self-esteem and confidence in the workplace will enable many youth to transition from a gang-infested neighborhood to a healthier, more productive environment.

16. Provide funding and in-kind resources to community-based or local government programs working with youth.

Nevada businesses have long supported community-based or government programs through grants and valuable in-kind resources of supplies, services, and volunteer staff. Business should increase these efforts on behalf of Nevada's youth by offering these valuable resources to assist economically depressed and gang-affected

areas. Public-private partnerships are essential to effectively address the complex problems of Nevada's working families.

17. **Utilize employment policies that are supportive of families and advocate for responsive services to meet the needs of Nevada's workers.**

Nevada has a unique 24-hour work environment and business interests should work with local government and community-based programs to ensure that workers' needs are adequately addressed through evening/weekend service hours, flexible employment policies, and neighborhood-based services.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

"At school there didn't used to be very many Chicanos. The gabachos, they used to make me feel bad 'cause they always came to school with nice clothes on. They always had plenty to eat for lunch or they had lots of money to buy their lunch."

-- Mousie, age 17

Local government entities must take an active role in coordinating youth gang prevention, intervention and suppression programs by targeting resources to address these issues, and working closely with public and private resources to provide a comprehensive service delivery system to support Nevada's families.

18. Set local government budget priorities to allocate balanced funding to youth gang prevention and enforcement programs.

Locally funded and administered youth gang prevention and enforcement programs are more responsive to the unique needs of their community, utilizing the resources of local law enforcement agencies and community-based organizations. These programs can effectively identify at-risk youths and work with them to deter gang affiliation. Youth counselors, crisis intervention services, family-based programming, and a strong neighborhood law enforcement presence are vital to the overall strategy of combatting youth gangs in Nevada.

19. Ensure that local government services are available and accessible to families through extended hours and decentralized locations.

Local government can play a major supportive role for Nevada's families by ensuring that services, such as health, recreation, and prevention programs, are available to families through extended hours (evenings/weekends) and accessible through decentralized, neighborhood-based service locations.

20. Develop a model Office of Neighborhood Services to provide local government/community-based services in neighborhoods of urban centers.

The model of local government services in Neighborhood Offices has been successfully implemented throughout the

country, most notably in Portland, Oregon, as an effective means of bringing services to the people.

Neighborhood associations established with the offices ensure that residents' voices are heard by local government and involve citizens in planning and implementation of needed programs. Local governments can form public-private partnerships with community-based organizations to assist neighborhoods in organizing associations, identifying neighborhood issues and concerns, and carrying out projects and recommendations. Neighborhoods with identified youth gang problems should be among the first to develop an Office of Neighborhood Services.

EXECUTIVE RECOMMENDATIONS

The Executive branch of government has a unique role in serving as a highly-visible leader with the capacity for mobilizing public and private resources to combat a crisis facing the state. We believe the Governor's office can play a crucial role in prioritizing the commitment of Nevada to a comprehensive solution to the problem of youth gangs, reflected in a balanced funding approach between prevention/early intervention programs and law enforcement.

Nevada's ability to attract new businesses to support the goal of a diversified economy may well depend on their perception of the security and stability of our business climate as potential industries evaluate our commitment to resolving social problems such as youth gangs.

The following recommendations are made to the executive branch as the vehicles for mobilizing the state's resources to more effectively address youth gangs in Nevada.

21. Direct the Youth Services Division to establish a statewide clearinghouse of information regarding successful models for prevention, intervention, and community mobilization programs and methods for obtaining funding for such programs.

Nevada needs to compile information regarding effective programs and strategies to prevent and intervene with youth gangs to prevent violence, and work with at-risk youth to encourage them to remain out of gangs. Information about innovative and effective model programs should be sought and distributed throughout the state to assist public and private youth-serving agencies in replicating successful programs in their own communities.

The statewide clearinghouse should also provide information regarding possible funding sources, upon request. Public and private resources could be channelled through the clearinghouse to rural and urban communities requesting assistance.

22. Authorize funding for youth gang programs that emphasize early intervention, prevention and diversion of at-risk youth; are family-oriented; are decentralized and neighborhood-based; and utilize an approach that is comprehensive, integrated and balanced between

prevention and enforcement efforts.

Youth gang programs must be implemented in Nevada with the components outlined above if we hope to "stem the tide" against youth gangs in our state. Leadership in funding these critical programs is needed to ensure that our youth and their families receive needed services which will enable them to strengthen their families and allow youth to make healthier life choices. Enforcement efforts alone will not succeed; they must be combined with prevention and intervention programs.

LEGISLATIVE RECOMMENDATIONS

The Nevada State Legislature plays a key leadership role in establishing legislative and policy actions to support effective solutions to the youth gang problem. The following recommendations are submitted for their consideration.

- 23. Enact legislation to allocate state subsidy dollars through the Youth Services Division using a population-based formula to establish multi-disciplinary programs for youth gang prevention and intervention activities.**

State subsidy dollars should be provided to local communities to combat youth gang problems, allowing communities to spend funds as their needs are identified and a course of action is agreed upon. To be effective, programs must have a multi-disciplinary emphasis.

- 24. Enact legislation to mandate that the State Department of Education create a more effective screening tool to improve detection of children in primary grades with physiological or psychological learning disabilities.**

Many at-risk youth who drop out of school have physical or mental impairments that result in learning disabilities such as poor eyesight or hearing, dyslexia, or poor learning abilities tied to malnutrition or an unbalanced diet. Youth often become frustrated and depressed, are disciplinary problems, and ultimately leave school in order to escape from the negative situation. Discouragement and under- or unemployment lead them directly to gangs, drugs, and criminal activity.

Research has documented that 40% to 60% of all youths incarcerated in institutions suffer from learning disabilities. Early identification of these at-risk children and effective interventions such as health services or remedial training will help to build self-esteem and give them a chance at success.

- 25. Enact legislation to subsidize Juvenile Probation Departments through the State Youth Services Division, to establish early identification programs.**

Local juvenile probation departments and juvenile courts should establish intake and assessment centers to screen juveniles for early identification and

intervention of all status offenders, (runaways, incorrigibles, truants etc.) The process must conform to existing state and Federal time restrictions, but will allow authorities to attempt a crisis intervention with families and follow-up with community-based services to resolve the problem.

PROBATION AND PAROLE RECOMMENDATIONS

"We have experienced a tremendous shift; today's youth brings with them a multitude of behavioral problems often times merely masking their emotional or physical abuse and immediate mental health care needs. It will take the combined cooperation of all of our youth-oriented agencies to work with and treat these dysfunctional families as a whole."

-- Sue Carano, Unit Supervisor
Washoe County Juvenile Probation Dept.

Probation and parole interventions are critical to the effective monitoring of the activities of youth gang offenders. Probation departments can also play a crucial prevention role in targeting youth at-risk of becoming involved in gangs for increased services.

While some probation/parole offices in the state are already implementing some of these recommendations, we encourage each department to review its operations and adapt these recommendations to meet the needs of their community.

26. Develop neighborhood probation offices to address the needs of high-risk areas.

Decentralized outreach offices will assist probation officers to interact more intensely with youth gang members and address neighborhood concerns. They will become more aware of gang members' habits, patterns, practices and families. They will be in a better position to assist law enforcement officers in targeting and removing the high-risk violent gang member from the neighborhood, while redirecting the less sophisticated members away from more intensive gang involvement.

Juvenile probation departments should explore the feasibility of various methods for providing increased services to families utilizing a neighborhood-based model. Examples of this approach are outreach offices located in storefronts or neighborhood schools and flexible or non-traditional office hours, (i.e. evenings and Saturdays), when families are more likely to seek assistance.

27. Provide increased structured surveillance for the hardcore youth offender, and increased programming for the less sophisticated gang member.

Intensive supervision programs have proven effective in working with hard-core youth offenders and should be employed throughout Nevada for this group of youth gang members. Similar supervision practices could be adopted to increase programming for "want-to-be's" and less sophisticated gang members, ensuring more communication between the youth, probation officers, and agencies providing assistance.

Expanding intensive supervision programs for the less sophisticated youth gang member should be accomplished through the hiring of additional staff as opposed to expanding or restructuring existing priorities within probation departments.

28. Recruit additional officers, male and female, from a representative cross section of ethnic groups possessing bilingual skills and sensitivity to special language or cultural needs.

Bilingual and multi-cultural recruitment and hiring needs to be accomplished as soon as possible in order to implement effective prevention programming. This recommendation should not be interpreted as waiting for the replacement of staff through natural attrition, for departments must immediately recruit staff members who possess bilingual skills and an understanding of the unique cultural problems that affect youth gang offenders and ethnic communities.

29. In conjunction with community businesses and agencies with similar goals, form a job readiness partnership to train and assist youth seeking gainful employment.

Many youth join gangs because they do not possess the skills necessary to gain or maintain employment and therefore turn to delinquent activity for their income. A job readiness partnership will assist in screening, training and placing youth in community businesses with intensive follow-up by agency workers to assure youth are successful at maintaining their work relationships.

Job readiness activities should prepare youth for jobs that provide them with earning potential as well as self-esteem from successful employment. Adult mentors could be utilized to assist individual youth with work-related problems and serve as role models in the workplace.

30. Develop joint prevention, intervention and treatment programs with community-based youth and family agencies.

Juvenile probation departments must work cooperatively with community-based youth and family agencies to develop effective partnerships in the areas of prevention, intervention and treatment programs. While each community must design and implement programming that meets their unique needs, the following examples are offered as baseline joint programs which should be available throughout the state:

- a. Initiate a parent education program to assist parents in the identification of their child's drug or gang involvement and provide information regarding referrals to community-based programs.
 - b. Develop prevention programs based on enhancing family relationships through family-based programming that encourages increased family interaction, communication, and activities.
 - c. Provide ongoing gang prevention training for youth-serving professionals, family members, and the public through an information network including speakers from other communities.
- 31. Provide ongoing training for probation officers regarding local gang trends, issues, and concerns.**

Probation officers must be constantly updated as youth gang problems evolve in Nevada. Training must be current in regard to new trends, issues, and concerns. National youth gang resources should be utilized as well as state and local expertise.

32. Develop programs for male and female youth gang members to facilitate positive role modeling whereby youth learn hygiene, presentation skills, and other life skills.

Implementation of these programs could be accomplished through the recruitment and training of community volunteers who could be linked with youth according to like interests and goals. Local businesses, such as beauty salons or automobile repair shops, could be targeted to provide individualized apprenticeships and support for neighborhood youth.

33. Collaborate with school officials to develop an early identification and intervention program targeted to younger children to prevent further escalation of gang involvement.

Probation departments should develop outreach programs with schools to identify and intervene with elementary-aged children who are at-risk of youth gang involvement. This recommendation represents an expansion of the role of the probation department beyond statutory limits into true early intervention, whereby identified children would be counseled at the probation level. Probation departments should also advocate for the expansion of school and community partnership programs on a statewide basis to address high-risk elementary students.

LAW ENFORCEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

"I have been a prosecutor and police officer for nineteen years and five months and am now District Court Judge. It is my belief that youth gangs create a clear and present danger to the very fabric of our society. In my judgment, all branches of government should use all the tools and avenues available in an attempt to cure the problem which, if not unchecked, only serves to foster and promote adult criminality at some later date."

-- Mills Lane, District Judge

An aggressive law enforcement presence is vital if Nevada is to effectively combat the proliferation of youth gangs in our state. Law enforcement must act strongly and decisively to youth gang activity involving weapons, violence, drugs or habitual offenders.

The potential for entrenchment of gang culture in Nevada is great, and law enforcement must make a commitment to work closely with community leaders, community organizations and others to develop a community-based plan to prevent the spread of gang affiliation.

Specifically, our recommendations to law enforcement are:

34. Establish criminal youth gang enforcement units in local jurisdictions as appropriate, composed of local law enforcement agency personnel, school and university police, juvenile probation and parole officers, assigned on a permanent basis, to share information and coordinate enforcement activities.

The criminal youth gang enforcement units should be designed by each jurisdiction to meet their needs to closely coordinate intelligence gathering, case tracking, and enforcement efforts in response to criminal youth gang activity. Police and sheriff's departments need to work in collaboration with school and university police to ensure a concerted effort by law enforcement agencies to enforce and investigate youth gang criminal activity. It is imperative that these units work closely with patrol officers to ensure effective information sharing regarding the investigation or suppression of youth gang crimes.

- 35. Consolidate youth gang intelligence gathering through an automated information system accessible by all law enforcement agencies, with safeguards in place to ensure confidentiality and appropriate use of information.**

Intelligence information should be consolidated through a computerized system shared by police, sheriff, juvenile probation and parole, school and university law enforcement to share knowledge about impending youth gang activity, coordination of cases and law enforcement intervention. The system should include a mechanism for sharing information gleaned by non-law enforcement agencies working with youth as well while ensuring confidentiality and appropriate use of the information.

- 36. Establish a professionally-staffed Community Youth Gang Task Force including representatives of law enforcement, schools, juvenile probation and parole, youth, and community organizations to review local issues and develop alternatives and resources for prevention, education and intervention programs.**

No one agency can effectively resolve the youth gang problem; only a multifaceted, cooperative effort can reduce the violence and criminal activity. While law enforcement agencies have knowledge of street activities and current levels of the problem, much can be gained from becoming more sensitized to the needs of community, school, and business entities.

The Community Youth Gang Task Force's role is to review issues associated with youth gangs in the local community, and develop alternatives and resources for prevention, education and intervention programs. Former youth gang members can also be included in the task force to help plan effective programs.

- 37. Recruit additional officers from a representative cross section of ethnic groups, possessing bilingual skills and sensitivity to cultural or language needs.**

Many youth gangs are formed within ethnic and immigrant communities and, in some cases, members may not speak English proficiently. Recent immigrants may not understand the structure of government services in this country, or may not understand the intent of law enforcement efforts and the desire of authorities to cooperate with the community.

Recruiting officers from a representative cross section of ethnic groups within the community, who possess the needed bilingual skills, will allow the law enforcement agency to operate more effectively within the community and enlist more support from ethnic communities.

38. **Provide ongoing training and support to field personnel in methods of gang enforcement and community cultural awareness.**

Effective training programs are needed to enhance the capability of law enforcement officers in monitoring, investigating and enforcing youth gang activities. Field patrol units are a valuable source of data about the current activities in the community. Continued training of specialized units and field personnel will enhance youth gang case investigations and enforcement activities while sensitizing field officers to cultural issues and concerns.

39. **Notify parents or guardians of their children's gang involvement and utilize appropriate community resources to attempt intervention, involving the child and family whenever possible.**

Many times parents or guardians may be unaware of the gang involvement of their children, either through a lack of knowledge regarding warning signs or a child's ability to hide their gang affiliation. Law enforcement should implement a parent/guardian notification program, structured to advise parents of a child's evolving gang affiliation and provide referrals to community-based parental support and family counseling programs.

40. **Implement neighborhood-based policing programs, to decentralize police services and more effectively serve targeted communities.**

Neighborhood-based policing programs may take the form of increased foot patrols, sub-stations in store front facilities, or implementation of police volunteer programs such as the Police Athletic League. Increased visibility and services in high-risk neighborhoods coupled with improved communication between business/resident interests and law enforcement will increase awareness on all levels, and improve cooperation.

JUDICIAL RECOMMENDATIONS

"Often times, gang members are products of a breakdown in the family structure. They do not possess respect for authority and their social skills are very limited. They also demonstrate very little interest in the educational process. Families need to be educated about the importance and benefit of acquiring social and educational skills. Most importantly, parents need to realize that their children must be their first priority."

-- Dorothy King, Youth Advisor
Wittenberg Hall Detention Center

Nevada's courts are the focal point for the final actions affecting youth gang offenders. The message from the bench should be tough on hardcore gang offenders who participate in the commission and planning of violent crime and drug trafficking offenses. At the same time, intervention programs should be ordered for the less sophisticated gang members.

The recommendations listed below focus on enhanced judicial training and court specialization as the key elements to enhance judicial interaction with youth gang offenders.

41. Establish, through the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, a youth gang-specific training and education program for Juvenile/Family Court Judges, probation officers, law enforcement and community-based representatives.

Specific curriculum designed to provide training and education programs relating to youth gangs is needed in Nevada. The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, located in Reno, is in a unique position to develop a state-of-the-art training program to instruct judges, probation officers, law enforcement and community-based representatives in the characteristics of gang activity, sentencing enhancement, special probation conditions, diversion alternatives, and sensitive victim/witness situations, and other considerations that affect youth gang cases.

42. Support the creation of Family Courts in Las Vegas and Reno and other jurisdictions as appropriate.

Family Courts provide a specialization in areas such as youth gangs whereby trained judges will have the opportunity to become more familiar with the specific attributes of youth gang cases which should, in turn, lead to more effective adjudication. Family courts can streamline the juvenile calendar and give priority to complex family situations which often encompass such issues as child care, housing and nutrition needs as well as youth gang involvement.

43. **Ensure that gang offenders who violate their probation or parole are returned to the judge who sentenced them.**

Given court caseloads and judicial schedules, probation and parole violations are often heard by a judge unfamiliar with the offender's criminal history or family situation. Repeat youth gang offenders must be treated strictly and consistently, ideally by the judge who issued the original sentence.

44. **Explore the feasibility of establishing special night court sessions to offer a convenient time for juvenile offenders to attend court with their parents or guardians.**

Daytime court schedules often conflict with work schedules for parents or guardians, and youth offenders may come before the court without them. Parental involvement in the court process is critical to encourage parental responsibility for providing effective supervision and guidance of their children.

Night courts will provide an opportunity for increased parental awareness of their children's behavior and ensure that parents are involved in whatever sentence or program that is deemed necessary for the child.

CORRECTIONS RECOMMENDATIONS

"In the area of juvenile corrections, the issue of minority over-representation in our institutions will present one of the greatest challenges of the next decade."

-- Robert Ranney, Director
Clark County Juvenile Court Services

Corrections organizations are a critical element in the overall strategy to fight criminal youth gangs in Nevada. The following recommendations have been developed to promote necessary changes in Nevada's youth corrections programs to enhance their resources and ability to work with youth gang offenders.

45. **Build a serious/chronic youth offenders correctional facility in Nevada to more effectively address the issue of "hardcore" youth gang members.**

Currently, Nevada's youth corrections facilities, the Elko and Caliente Training Centers, are ill equipped to provide the specialized services and treatment programs necessary to serve the serious and chronic youth offenders. The most violent and aggressive offenders are sent to a Tennessee facility at taxpayer expense, (\$ 291,999 in 1990). Treating these offenders in Nevada would be less costly, and ultimately more effective, especially if a family-focused treatment program were utilized.

The Elko facility has placed a cap on placements, potentially causing a "backlog" of referrals at the local level, especially in the urban areas of Las Vegas and Reno. As more of Elko's resources are reserved and targeted to the difficult-to-manage gang member, fewer resources will be available to work with less difficult youth with whom early intervention has greater potential effectiveness.

46. **Provide correctional officers with ongoing training in youth gang offender supervision, classification and investigative techniques.**

The intensive supervision inherent in a youth corrections facility provides an excellent opportunity to effectively work with youth gang offenders and gain valuable knowledge and intelligence information

regarding their make-up and activities. At the same time, effective supervision strategies require specialized training and knowledge of the attributes and profiling techniques available to evaluate and classify youth gang offenders.

Other states, particularly California, have developed successful model programs for working with youth gang inmates, and Nevada corrections facilities should take advantage of their technology to enhance correctional treatment of our state's youth gang offenders.

- 47. Coordinate intelligence-gathering activities between youth and adult corrections and enforcement agencies.**

Monitoring the movements, associations, and activities of youth gang offenders is becoming increasingly important as youth gangs develop more sophisticated organizations, including affiliations with prison gangs. As youth gangs become more mobile within Nevada, the coordination of intelligence information becomes critical to improve suppression of criminal activity. Coordination efforts should include a state-wide network of information and resources.

- 48. Enhance gang/drug treatment and prevention programs within youth correctional institutions and ensure that such programs are an element of preparation for release on parole.**

Youth corrections should prioritize the enhancement of its youth gang and drug treatment and prevention programs in an effort to separate inmates from these negative influences before and upon release from the institution. Programmatic emphasis on vocational and living skills will provide youth gang members with positive alternatives to gang affiliation. Parole conditions should be targeted to further deter continued youth gang and drug involvement.

- 49. Establish community-based half-way houses for youth gang parolees.**

Half-way houses for youth gang parolees will provide a community-based support network for youth as an alternative to returning to a neighborhood or family situation where the temptations of returning to the previous youth gang lifestyle are overwhelming.

Supervised group homes can provide effective "half-way" programming to ease the youth back into the community and help him/her develop a more supportive base for employment, schooling, and non-criminal activities.

50. Recruit additional youth corrections personnel from a representative cross section of ethnic groups, possessing bilingual skills and sensitivity to cultural or language needs.

Youth corrections personnel should also be recruited from a cross section of ethnic groups in order to be more effective in the supervision and treatment of youth gang offenders.

MEDIA RECOMMENDATIONS

Media coverage of the youth gang situation in Nevada is needed to raise awareness of the problem while documenting potential solutions. At the same time, the media must take responsibility for not glorifying criminal youth gang activity by sensationalizing the culture of youth gangs.

The media can cooperate in seeking solutions to the problem of youth gangs in Nevada through pro-active media coverage of positive youth activity in the community and leadership from local media personalities in a highly visible, multi-media prevention campaign.

- 51. Cover all aspects of the youth gang problem, including the success of intervention and prevention programs.**

While the media's primary concern is to report the news, reporters and editors must recognize that sensationalized coverage can instill fear in a community, encourage gang intimidation of citizens, and glamorize the gang culture. The media should make a concerted effort to report on positive efforts of youth and the community's successes in the fight against criminal youth gangs while also keeping the public informed of criminal and anti-social youth activities.

- 52. Establish a policy of reporting gang-related incidents that does not glorify the gang culture or attribute acts to any one gang by name.**

Responsible reporting techniques must be utilized to ensure that media coverage of youth gangs does not serve to perpetuate the youth gang phenomenon. For example, entertainment pieces on gang-related stories, such as the movie "Colors", should be strongly discouraged.

Gang members often seek notoriety for their criminal acts through the media in order to achieve status within the community and be successful in intimidating their neighborhoods. The media can diminish this effect by refusing to attribute criminal acts to specific gang members, minimizing photographs of gang members flashing signs or colors, not depicting gang graffiti, and avoiding sensational reporting styles.

53. Provide public service announcements and programming to educate the public on gang prevention techniques, parenting responsibilities, and available local resources.

Perhaps the most pro-active role the media can play in assisting their communities with the problem of youth gangs is to become very active in a multi-media public service campaign to deter youth from joining gangs, encourage parental responsibility and parenting education, and provide information regarding community resources.

The most effective communication in our society is through the media. Local television, radio, and newspaper personalities can offer their services to recruit public participation and cooperation in the prevention effort. The media should utilize special programming, talk shows, and newspaper columnists to reach diverse audiences and raise public awareness of what must be done to solve the youth gang problem in Nevada.

Appendix

- 1 Source: Reports from Clark County Juvenile Court Services, Washoe County Juvenile Probation Department, Carson City Juvenile Probation Department.
- 2 Children's Defense Fund, Children 1990: A Report Card, Briefing Book, and Action Primer, 1990.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 U.S. Census Bureau, 1990.
- 6 The Center for the Study of Social Policy, Kids Count: Data Book - State Profiles of Child Well-Being, January, 1990.
- 7 Washoe County and Clark County Juvenile Probation Departments.
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- 9 Children's Defense Fund, Children 1990: A Report Card, Briefing Book and Primer, 1990.
- 10 Governor's Maternal and Child Health Advisory Board Report: Healthy Nevadans 2000, 1990.
- 11 Children's Defense Fund, Children 1990: A Report Card, Briefing Book and Primer, 1990.
- 12 Governor's Maternal and Child Health Advisory Board Report: Healthy Nevadans 2000, 1990.
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- 15 Children's Defense Fund, Children 1990: A Report Card, Briefing Book and Primer, 1990.
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- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Children's Cabinet, Inc., Nevada's Children: Our Most Precious Resource?, 1989.
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