

**Mercer County  
Gang Prevention and Intervention Task Force  
Report and Recommendations**



**Brian M. Hughes  
Mercer County Executive**

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## **Acknowledgments**

In January 2005, County Executive Brian M. Hughes requested that the Mercer County Department of Human Services convene a task force to develop a human services response to the increasing presence of gangs in our County. This request proved quite timely, and many social service providers were very anxious to share their observations, questions and concerns about the issue. The department held a series of four meetings and one youth forum, and the results are presented in the following report. We also researched gangs extensively, and this information also is presented in this report.

We wish to thank the many community members who participated and contributed to the recommendations, our staff that has worked diligently to compile this report, as well as the co-chairs of the task force, Gary DeBlasio, Executive Director of Corner House, and John Duarte, Social Worker at the Mercer County Youth Detention Center, for their leadership.

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The pervasiveness of gangs throughout society cannot be denied. Gangs today are more sophisticated and flagrant in their use of violence and intimidation tactics, and they adversely affect the quality of life in our communities with violence, drugs and associated criminal activities.<sup>1</sup> Law enforcement convention marks gangs as security threat groups, which are formal or informal groups, organizations or associations consisting of three or more members who have a common name or common identifying signs, colors or symbols. In addition, members of security threat groups engage in patterns of gang activity or police department rule violation.<sup>2</sup>

The United States Department of Justice estimates that about 750,000 individuals, one-third of whom are younger than 18, are members of gangs. Although gang membership among girls has become more common in recent years, the overwhelming majority of gang members are male, representing more than 90 percent of the gang population in large cities.<sup>3</sup>

In general, statistics show that boys are at greater risk than girls for learning disabilities, illiteracy, dropping out of school, substance-abuse problems, violence, juvenile arrests and early death caused by violent behavior. Boys often begin to fall behind girls in elementary school, which leads to higher dropout rates and juvenile delinquency. Often these youths show signs of behavioral problems early in life. As boys grow older, risk behaviors, such as alcohol and drug abuse, become more prevalent, and gang involvement increases.<sup>4</sup>

Recently, the Rochester Youth Development Study investigated the causes and consequences of adolescent delinquency and drug use by following a sample of high-risk urban adolescents from their early teenage years through their early adult years. Results from this study show a strong relationship between gang membership and delinquent behavior, particularly that of a serious and violent nature. Data indicate that:

- Although they represented only one-third of the Rochester sample, gang members accounted for 86 percent of serious delinquent acts, 69 percent of violent delinquent acts and 70 percent of drug sales.<sup>5</sup>
- Gang members had higher rates of violent offenses when they were active gang members than either before or after they were gang members. This suggests that the norms and group dynamics of the gang facilitated delinquent and violent behavior.<sup>6</sup>
- Gang membership had a strong impact on the incidence of violent behavior, even when other risk factors, such as poverty, prior involvement in violence and association with delinquent peers, were held constant. This indicates that the high rates of violence by gang members were not simply the result of the accumulation of risk in their backgrounds.<sup>7</sup>

Although this study was conducted in Rochester, New York, the East Coast has seen extensive growth of gang membership and gang violence. As home to some of the world's most lucrative drug markets, the East Coast provides ample opportunity for gangs and security threat groups to flourish.<sup>8</sup> West Coast and Midwest influences, such as

“super gangs” like the Bloods, Crips, Latin Kings and Gangster Disciples, have become prevalent throughout the eastern United States. “Super gangs” can be defined as gangs with large memberships, and whose normal operations meet these criteria:

- Membership exceeds 1,000 members nationally.
- The gang can be documented in multiple states.
- The gang maintains extensive drug networks.
- The gang exercises aggressive recruiting strategies.
- The gang has multiethnic membership.
- The gang has advocated ambition for power and massive membership.

Groups in the Northeast that fit these criteria include: Almighty Latin King and Queen Nation (Latin Kings), Bloods/United Blood Nation/East Coast Blood Nation, Crips and Gangster Disciples.<sup>9</sup>

Since the mid 1990s, several major gangs have become visible in Mercer County. Around 1999, the Bloods appeared. This forced other gangs to recruit and mobilize in response to an overwhelming Bloods presence. Within the last few years, several other major gangs have appeared in the county. In addition to the Bloods, gangs in Mercer County include Black Gangster Disciples, MS13, Five Percenters, ATC13, Latin Kings and Netas.<sup>10</sup> According to the Mercer County Prosecutor’s Office, recent intelligence has determined that there are almost 50 active street gangs operating in Mercer County, with a combined membership of about 1,000 individuals. In addition, about 1,000 young Mercer County residents pass through the doors of the Trenton police youth section every year; about 120 of these are repeat offenders and of those, about 30 to 35 are genuine gang members responsible for most of the worst youth crime problems.<sup>11</sup>

State correctional systems in New Jersey, as well as in California, Colorado, Texas and Wisconsin and the Federal Bureau of Prisons, have the highest number of security threat group-involved inmates.<sup>12</sup> Due to the gang situation in Mercer County’s correctional facilities, the Mercer County Corrections Gang Intelligence Unit was created at the Mercer County Corrections Center. The unit identifies and monitors incarcerated members of security threat groups and gangs in the facility. Those assigned to the unit monitor “section” gangs, which represent particular sections or blocks in a geographic area.<sup>13</sup>

“The Bloods present the number one threat in New Jersey,” said Lt. Edwin Torres of the Gang Management Unit of the Juvenile Justice Commission, as reported in the *Times of Trenton* on Wednesday, February 23, 2005. The Bloods are heavily involved in the distribution of cocaine, heroin and marijuana, and use New Jersey as a primary distribution point.<sup>14</sup>

In the Mercer County Youth Detention Center (MCYDC), 10 percent to 25 percent of the youth incarcerated are gang members or affiliated with gangs. Most of these youth are members or affiliates of the Bloods.<sup>15</sup> The Bloods present a significant threat to law enforcement officers because of their predatory and violent behavior, as well as their

rivalry with the Crips, another growing gang in New Jersey and Mercer County. Members of the Bloods exhibit a preference for assault rifles, as do members of the Crips.<sup>16</sup>

The Crips operate in almost every city in the United States and have been identified in several foreign countries as well. By the late 1990s, the Crips were well established in New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Georgia, Connecticut, Florida, Pennsylvania and other East Coast regions.<sup>17</sup> Strong individualism and a commitment to foster violence upon other gangs distinguish members of the Crips. Their rivalry with the Bloods increases the likelihood of violent encounters between gang members.

Despite their temporary claim of being a peaceful organization, the gang is involved heavily in urban warfare, drug sales and recently violent take-over robberies and warehouse burglaries. According to gang experts, if Crips become more structured, they could present even more serious problems than created by other recognized gangs in prison.<sup>18</sup>

The Latin Kings is another gang that operates in Mercer County. It has regional chapters across the Midwest, the East Coast, the central states, Texas and California, with an estimated 25,000 to 50,000 members nationwide and about 20,000 members residing in Chicago. In particular, New York, New Jersey and Connecticut regions are hotbeds for Latin Kings activity, including drug-related crime and bitter turf wars.<sup>19</sup> Violent behavior is the hallmark of the Latin Kings; they also are involved in the sale of drugs, weapons trafficking and providing protection.

Although the Latin Kings are struggling to find and maintain leadership following the arrest of their leader, New Jersey and eastern Pennsylvania report continued growth of the Latin Kings. New Jersey and New York specifically have been identified as having heavy Latin Kings activity.<sup>20</sup> Although many Latin Kings gang leaders have been incarcerated, their leadership still has the ability to orchestrate rules and policies from prison.<sup>21</sup> Latin King members exert a strong influence over corrections officers and routinely order hits on those who fail to cooperate with them.<sup>22</sup>

The Netas also exert a strong influence in New Jersey and Mercer County. This gang formed in 1979 in a Puerto Rican prison, and during the late 1980s, members migrated to the United States, mostly settling in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut. By 1994, the New Jersey Department of Corrections identified several Netas within the prison system and began to monitor their criminal activities there. By 1996, Netas were found throughout inner-city neighborhoods and prison systems. As of 2000, several investigations were conducted against the Netas, and the gang members' presence in the streets diminished while their presence in the local, state and federal prisons increased.<sup>23</sup>

Numerous other gang "sets" pose a threat to Mercer County as well, but will not be highlighted in this report.

## **Mercer County Government Response**

Mercer County Executive Brian M. Hughes has made it a priority to address the problem of gang activity in Mercer County. Recognizing that this task cannot be performed by any one entity, he has called upon all of Mercer County to work together; it has been documented that the most effective responses to gangs have been communitywide. All entities and agencies he has asked to participate have agreed to increased cooperation to tackle guns, gangs, drugs and crime in Trenton and countywide.<sup>24</sup>

In a recent meeting, Mr. Hughes and the mayors and police chiefs from Mercer County municipalities discussed how they could work together to integrate law enforcement and human services approaches to confronting gang activity while pushing for greater involvement from school districts. Mr. Hughes seeks to involve educators in the campaign against gangs and advocates for intercommunication among all youth-serving agencies. The County Executive recently convened the Mercer County Superintendents of Schools to discuss what the county has been doing, and to solicit feedback from school officials as to what they identified as needing from the county. This was the first of ongoing meetings.

In addition, Mr. Hughes conferred with the Chiefs of Police Association, which has created a task force of local law enforcement organizations. Mercer County officials are calling on Acting Governor Richard J. Codey; the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives; and various other state and federal agencies to ensure that the county receives all the resources it needs “to make a stand.”<sup>25</sup>

### **Mercer County Department of Human Services**

During the past year, the Mercer County Department of Human Services has developed a comprehensive funding and program strategy to stem the tide of youth violence, including gangs. In January 2005, Mercer County Executive Brian M. Hughes directed the county’s Department of Human Services and the Mercer County Youth Services Commission to establish a Gang Prevention and Intervention Task Force. The task force met regularly for six months, guided by co-chairs Gary DeBlasio, Executive Director of Corner House, and John Duarte, Social Worker at the Mercer County Youth Detention Center. The task force was created early this year to assess the gang problem in Mercer County from a human services perspective; research promising approaches and model programs; identify possible funding sources; and create a plan that can be coordinated with law enforcement, schools and related groups.

### **Description and Purpose of the Mercer County Gang Prevention and Intervention Task Force**

The Gang Prevention and Intervention Task Force is composed of nonprofit, community-based organizations; civic groups; human services professionals; youth advocates; court personnel; school officials; law enforcement and representatives from the community at-large. Ninety-five people representing various agencies throughout Mercer County attended the first meeting held on January 18, 2005, at the Lawrence

Township Community Center. At this meeting, participants were asked to assign themselves to groups that focused on: education/training; programs/services for *prevention* of gang involvement and program/services for *intervention* of gang involvement; parent/family involvement and legislation/advocacy.

The training group focused on creating programs that teach law enforcement, social service agencies, school personnel and other youth-serving groups how to deal with adolescents involved with gangs. The prevention and intervention groups focused on services/programs, and are working on ideas to keep children from joining gangs, and how to work with youth who are involved in gangs. The parent/family involvement group is creating more ways for families to get involved in their children's lives, and how to make sure that parents/guardians recognize gang activity. The group focused on legislation is identifying current laws that address gang violence and ways to create new ones.

At the February 8, 2005 meeting, the groups were asked to answer the same questions as they related to each group. They were asked to identify the top 10 categories for each group needed in Mercer County, and to identify whether each category could provide the most effective use of resources for short-term and long-term implementation. Of the top 10 categories, task force members were asked to identify which would be most effective in Mercer County, in Trenton and in the suburbs, and which of those would be most acceptable to the community and target populations. The groups also were asked to prioritize their top 10 choices for implementation in the short term and the long term in Mercer County.

The third meeting was held March 8, 2005. Each of the five groups were asked to focus on their top three to top five choices from the top 10 the previous month, and then to develop working plans for their choices. Included in the working plans were names of agencies that are providing services in these areas, what gaps are in the services and how those gaps can be filled. Goals, objectives and action plans were formulated, as well as cost estimates.

On April 7, 2005, the Mercer County Department of Human Services hosted a teen gang forum at the Lawrence Township Community Council for teens involved in the county's municipal alliances. Present were about 40 teens from the Hamilton, Hopewell, Lawrence, Princeton and Trenton Municipal Alliances. At this focus group, young people indicated that gangs are prevalent in their neighborhoods.

Twenty-nine of 36 teens (81 percent) said gangs are present in the area where they live, and 28 of 36 (78 percent) said gangs are present in their schools and communities. Twenty-three of 35 respondents (66 percent) indicated that they believe it is dangerous to join a gang, however, some of these youth said they probably will join a gang anyway. Nineteen of 35 youth (54 percent) indicated that someone in their families belongs to, or used to belong to, gangs. Sixteen of the 36 respondents (44 percent) said they were thinking of joining a gang, but interestingly, all youth from Lawrenceville present at the focus group said they were thinking of becoming a gang member. Even though all 11

Lawrenceville youth said they were thinking of becoming a gang member, eight of them (73 percent) indicated that it was dangerous to be in a gang, and seven of the 11 (64 percent) thought that gang members are troublemakers. Additionally, nine of the 11 youth (82 percent) from Lawrenceville believed that gang membership increased their likelihood of getting into trouble. Interestingly, only one of the 11 (9 percent) indicated that it is “cool” to be in a gang.

In addition, this focus group reaffirmed that many youth are unafraid and desensitized to gang activity. Quotes from youth at the focus group include:

- “Killing is a fact.”
- “Death is a part of everyday life.”
- “Kids are not afraid to die.”

Overall themes that the youth expressed were the need for parents to enforce positive behavior instead of street values; the involvement of caring adults; more recreation activities in which youth can participate, with the understanding that people at the programs, and not the programs themselves, will make the difference; and the need for “fast” money.

In addition to the department’s oversight and partnership with the Mercer County Division of Youth Services on the task force, it has other connections to the gang issue. Multiple divisions within the Mercer County Department of Human Services are addressing the issues of gang and violence across Mercer County through different initiatives, programs and/or trainings and discussions with parents and youth.

At the beginning of April, the Department of Human Services announced funding to address violence prevention in youth. Because there is strong evidence that investing in prevention programs pays off, the department has devoted a larger pool of county funds in 2005 to this area. Total funds, more than \$415,000, will be used to expand or develop programs that discourage delinquent activity in youth, or to intervene very early in the lives of youth who have shown violence. The funding will focus on four categories: mentoring, violence prevention, first-time offenders, and prevention and early intervention for substance abuse. Funding for this has been awarded to programs serving high-risk youth, many of whom are vulnerable to gang recruitment.

### **Mercer County Office of Addiction Services**

As another way to address violence, the Mercer County Office of Addiction Services funds eight municipal alliances that encompass 12 municipalities. A total of \$421,000 funds 93 programs in the county that address drug abuse prevention, and the division’s staff provides technical assistance and programmatic support to each municipal alliance. This is important, as there is a strong correlation between the use and/or abuse of alcohol and other drugs and violence. According to results from the Seattle Social Development Project, youth who had marijuana available to them were 3.6 times more likely to join

and remain in a gang than were youth with no risk factors or only one risk factor. In addition, those who used marijuana at an early age were 3.7 times more likely to join and remain in a gang.<sup>26</sup>

### **Mercer County Division of Mental Health**

In addition, the Mercer County Division of Mental Health appropriated \$50,000 in new funding in 2005 for early detection of emotional problems in very young children that could lead them to become involved in multiple systems. Agencies funded by the Mercer County Division of Mental Health also address gang involvement and violence in various ways. About \$90,000 funds two children's day treatment programs that provide services for youth with mental health problems who often find themselves on the wrong end of the law. Another \$100,000 pays for children's outpatient services for youth and families with behavioral health needs, including those experiencing trouble with the law.

Catholic Charities provides a program called New Choices, which the County helps fund, and by estimation through admission and court records, 80 percent of the program's population is gang involved at one of three levels: original gang member leadership, regular membership and those who are interested but not initiated. The program addresses gang issues by using: speakers who are or were gang members as an attempt to convince the youth of the futility of gang involvement; a curriculum developed by the Youth Center of Juvenile Intervention Program that employs films, discussion guides and games to address the issue; and individual sessions that focus on the goals of each youth attempting to point out possibilities for success outside the gang structure.

Greater Trenton Behavioral Health Care provides gang prevention activities through curriculum, training and other programs. Greater Trenton has formed the "Partnership for Safe Schools and Healthy Students" with the Trenton Board of Education, New Jersey Juvenile Justice Commission, Mercer County Division of Mental Health and the Trenton Police Department. This provides academic, nontraditional middle school, research-based violence prevention and intervention strategies for mental health/substance abuse and truancy problems; in-school, after-school and home-based services; mentoring; and culturally sensitive experiences. In addition, the agency addresses problems with attachment and bonding in its children/youth programs, especially the school-based services targeting younger children. The agency takes the stance that stronger attachments are necessary to prevent gang involvement.

For its staff, Family Guidance Center has conducted two two-hour trainings with local gang experts around general issues related to mental health and gangs. In addition, the agency is writing a grant to obtain funding so they can roll out the Project Phoenix curriculum in the agency's special education and adolescent day treatment programs in Ewing Township.

Many providers funded by Mercer County use best practice models for violence prevention. The City of Trenton/Trenton Municipal Alliance and YETS use Project Towards No Drug Abuse for their work in the community; the MCYDC uses it as well. This program is a drug-abuse prevention program that targets heterogeneous samples of

high school-age youth ages 14 to 19. Reductions in cigarette smoking, alcohol use, marijuana use, hard drug use and victimization have been revealed at one-year and two-year follow-up periods.<sup>27</sup>

Various municipal alliances use Life Skills Training (LST), a primary intervention that targets all middle/junior high school students. Initial intervention is geared toward grades 6 and 7, depending on the school structure, with booster sessions in the two subsequent years. The program consists of three major components that teach students: general self-management skills, social skills and information and skills specifically related to drug use.

Results from more than 12 studies consistently show that the Life Skills Training program dramatically reduces tobacco, alcohol and marijuana use. In addition, studies show that this program works with a diverse range of adolescents, produces results that are long lasting, and is effective when taught by teachers, peer leaders or health professionals.<sup>28</sup>

The Multisystemic Therapy (MST) and Nurse Family Partnership programs also are best practice programs, however, Mercer County providers do not offer MST. The Multisystemic Therapy program is an intensive family-based and community-based treatment that addresses the multiple determinants of serious antisocial behavior in juvenile offenders. The program targets chronic, violent or substance-abusing male or female juvenile offenders ages 12 to 17 at high risk of out-of-home placement and their families. It views individuals as part of a complex network of interconnected systems that encompass individual, family and extrafamilial factors — peers, schools and neighborhoods — to facilitate change.<sup>29</sup>

Multisystemic Therapy's goal is to empower parents with the skills and resources needed to address independently the difficulties that arise when raising teenagers and to empower youth to cope with family, peer, and school and neighborhood problems. Evaluations of the program have demonstrated for serious juvenile offenders a reduction in long-term rates of rearrest; reductions of out-of-home placements; extensive improvements in family functioning and decreased mental health problems for serious juvenile offenders.<sup>30</sup> Social service providers, specifically those who work closely with youth involved in the juvenile justice system, can use the program.

The Nurse Family Partnership program consists of intensive and comprehensive home visitation by nurses during a woman's pregnancy and the first two years after birth of the woman's first child. In Trenton, the Juvenile Justice Commission grants \$400,000 in funds to the Nurse Family Partnership, which also is part of the Children's Futures initiative.

Although the primary mode of service delivery is home visitation, the program depends upon other health and human services to achieve its positive effects. Results from one 15-year study indicate that women and children who were provided a nurse home visitor had fewer verified reports of child abuse or neglect; fewer maternal behavioral problems due to alcohol and drug abuse; fewer maternal arrests; fewer

instances of the children running away; fewer arrests of the children; and fewer instances of alcohol consumption by the children.<sup>31</sup>

Another study supports these results. One aspect that the Rochester Youth Development Study examined was the quality of parent-child relationships to determine the impact of family process factors, such as attachment, involvement and supervision, on delinquency. Researchers found that:

- Attachment and involvement were both significantly related to delinquency. Children who were more attached to, and involved with, their parents were less involved in delinquency.<sup>32</sup>
- The relationship between family process factors and delinquency was bi-directional. Poor parenting increased the probability of delinquent behavior, and delinquent behavior further weakened the relationship between parent and child.<sup>33</sup>

As very young children reach school age, they become more influenced by external factors – neighborhood playmates and peers in school. The Rochester Youth Development Study also examined the relationship between educational factors and delinquency and drug use and found that:

- Weak school commitment and poor school performance were associated with increased involvement in delinquency and drug use.<sup>34</sup>
- School success was associated with resilience. High-risk youth who avoided delinquency and drug use were more attached to school and teachers and had better performance scores than high-risk youth who were involved in delinquency and drug use.<sup>35</sup>
- Involvement in delinquency reduced commitment to school; involvement in drug use increased chances of dropping out of school.<sup>36</sup>

Results from another study, the Seattle Social Development Project, indicate that various academic factors can predict future gang membership. In this study, young people who had learning disabilities were 3.6 times more likely to join and remain in a gang than were their peers with no risk factors of joining and remaining in a gang, or only one risk factor of joining and remaining in a gang. Also compared with those with no or one risk factor of joining a gang and remaining in a gang, this study showed that youth who have low academic achievement are 3.1 times more likely to do so; those with low school attachment are 2 times more likely; those with low school commitment are 1.8 times more likely; and those with low academic aspirations are 1.6 times more likely to join and remain in a gang.<sup>37</sup>

## **The Mercer County School Districts**

The Mercer County Schools are taking a stand against gangs in schools. Certain school districts are placing resource officers in the schools to help combat growing incidences of violence. The Hamilton School District places a Hamilton Township patrol officer in Steinert High School, Hamilton High School West, Nottingham High School and McCorristin High School. These four officers perform law enforcement duties and work with students on social issues. A detective with the Hopewell Township Police Department works 20 hours per week between Hopewell Valley Central and Timberlane Middle School. His function serves as both a counselor and a law enforcement officer. He offers classes on bullying, and talks to students about how the law impacts them within the school environment.

In Lawrence Township, three schools — Lawrence High School, Lawrence Middle School and Lawrence Intermediate School — each have one school resource officer; all are Lawrence Township Police officers. The officers are involved in many functions aimed at drug and alcohol use prevention and violence prevention. In addition to being an active, high-profile law enforcement officer, the school resource officer is a resource for students, parents, teachers and administration regarding law issues. Another duty is to be a link to other service agencies that provide preventive and counseling services within the school district. Working with the principals, the school resource officers help find solutions to problems affecting school-age children. Lawrence's school resource officers proactively support youth in confronting alcohol, tobacco and drug use; peer pressure; gang activity; and early sexual activity. Also, the schools have hosted assemblies about gangs.

The Trenton School District employs security guards at all of its schools. When there is a major problem that the guards cannot handle, they call the local police officers to assist. An increase in gang-related activity has become evident in recent years, and young people have become increasingly eager to display their affiliations with gangs. The Trenton School District is discussing an increase in school security, particularly in those schools where serious outbreaks of violence have occurred.

Trenton Mayor Douglas H. Palmer sponsors many discussion forums for the increasingly troublesome gang issue. In addition, a partnership between the school district and local middle schools brings in gang prevention presentations through Trenton Municipal Alliance Committee and Trenton Youth Project Early Prevention program. The school district partners with the Strengthening Families program as well.

In the Ewing School District, one Ewing Police officer divides his time between Fisher Junior High and Ewing High School as a resource officer. He straddles police duties and works with the youth, as there are active gang members in Ewing schools. He talks frankly with students about gangs and the possible consequences of becoming involved with this lifestyle.

Although the West Windsor School District does not have any resource officers in the schools, officers continue to speak to parent-teacher organizations about gang awareness. The East Windsor School District does not have a resource officer, but plans to hire one

in the near future. The Princeton School District does not employ any resource officers in its schools, but a police officer goes to John Witherspoon Middle School every day at dismissal time in an unofficial capacity.

### **The Mercer County Youth Detention Center**

The Mercer County Youth Detention Center works directly with gang members. Specifically, all 57 staff members have attended a recently implemented, four-hour gang training program. This workshop focused on gang identification and gang management in an institutional setting.

In addition, new intake and gang intelligence gathering procedures have been established at the Youth Detention Center. All information obtained during a resident's intake interview now gets documented for future reference. For each youth who is admitted to the center, the intake officer completes a gang identification/affiliation form. If he or she determines that the resident is affiliated with or is a member of a gang, the information is forwarded to the program manager or designee for follow up. The program manager or designee will interview the resident and will complete a gang membership validation form.

Information then is forwarded to an intake database, resident file and a social services file. The program manager maintains the gang affiliation/membership file. The information identifying specific youth under the jurisdiction of the Mercer County Juvenile Detention Center will be shared with appropriate parties in accordance with Chapter 4A, including the Mercer County Family Court system, the Mercer County Sheriff's Office, the Mercer County Prosecutor's Office and other appropriate entities.

The Youth Detention Center also has put programs in place for its youth. Because research has shown that many of the youth in the detention center do not have strong family ties – in many cases either one or both parents are absent – the center's staff has established mentoring and life-skills programming. These intensive services will continue once the youth are released from the detention center to give youth positive role models to help them turn their lives around.

The MCYDC also employs a host of other interventions and strategies to positively impact the young people staying at the facility: physical and mental health screenings; psychiatric evaluations and medication monitoring; suicide prevention; case management by a team of in-house social workers; counseling; on-site schooling; health education; a psychological education program; discussion groups; religious services; recreation; an on-site young adult library; a computer lab; and a normative peer behavior modification system.

### **The Mercer County Library System**

The Department of Human Services also communicates with the public via the Mercer County Library System. The system has sponsored four educational forums on gangs: two that taught people how to recognize gangs and gang activity, and two that discussed prevention and intervention practices and what the community can do. A fifth

program in June posed as an informal question and answer session for Mercer County residents.

In addition, the library system hosted focus groups for youth and parents/guardians in June. The two youth groups allowed youth between the ages of 14 and 17 to discuss their experiences with gangs, or to discuss their concerns or ask questions about their neighborhoods and schools. Lionel Henderson, Superintendent of the Mercer County Youth Detention Center, led these discussions. The two groups for parents/guardians were led by Marc Celentana, Ph.D., Mental Health Administrator, and Camille Bloomberg, LPC, Municipal Alliance Coordinator. They informed parents/guardians of steps taken by the Mercer County Department of Human Services to reduce gang violence, and listened to concerns from parents and guardians regarding the issue of gangs in Mercer County. Upon request, department staff will be available to facilitate additional focus groups throughout the county at different venues.

The Mercer County Library System also has made gang information and resources available. Staff in the library system compiled a document that lists book titles that are available within the county library system, as well as lists of useful websites, articles and publications that are available online free of charge, and agencies that have knowledge of the gang situation countywide, statewide and nationwide.

### **The Mercer County Traumatic Loss Coalition**

The Mercer County Traumatic Loss Coalition (TLC), affiliated with the Mercer County Department of Human Services, recommends interweaving into their duties a philosophy of building intentional relationships with adolescents, thus giving young people access to adults who care without creating another program. The coalition members believe that creating more programs is not the solution to gang prevention, as there are more than 130 youth programs in Trenton. A way to address gang prevention is building positive relationships between youth and adults. An upcoming conference, sponsored by the TLC and targeted to parents and clergy, will emphasize techniques to build healthy relationships between caring adults and youth.

The Hopewell Municipal Alliance, along with the Hopewell Health Office, is promoting this through the use of the “Healthy Communities, Healthy Youth” initiative developed by the Search Institute as a model program for relationship building. The program’s mission is to motivate and equip individuals, organizations and their leaders to join in nurturing competent, caring and responsible children and adolescents. Based on the institute’s framework of developmental assets, the major goals of “Healthy Communities, Healthy Youth” are: to raise national consciousness about the urgency and feasibility of mobilizing individuals, communities, policy and resources to take positive action on behalf of all children and adolescents; to help communities develop and implement coordinated and long-term efforts to promote the healthy development of all children and adolescents; to motivate and equip schools, religious institutions, youth-serving organizations and other institutions to develop and implement asset-building strategies; to motivate and equip families to build developmental assets; to activate the asset-building capacity of all citizens, regardless of age or family status; and to engage

children and adolescents in building assets in their lives, in the lives of their peers and in contributing to communitywide initiatives.<sup>38</sup>

The institute's 40 developmental assets are concrete, common sense, positive experiences and qualities essential to raising successful young people. The assets are categorized into two groups of 20 assets. External assets are the positive experiences that young people receive from the world around them. These are about supporting and empowering young people, about setting boundaries and expectations, and about positive and constructive use of young people's time. External assets identify important roles that families, schools, congregations, neighborhoods and youth organizations can play in promoting healthy development. The 20 internal assets identify those characteristics and behaviors that reflect positive internal growth and development of young people. These are about positive values and identities, social competencies and commitment to learning. Internal assets will help young people make thoughtful and positive choices and, in turn, be better prepared for situations in life that challenge their inner strength and confidence.<sup>39</sup> Research indicates that the more assets a youth has, the less likely he or she is to get involved in dangerous behavior.

### **Mercer County Commission on Abused, Neglected and Missing Children**

Another commission affiliated with the Department of Human Services also is focusing efforts on gang programs. Each year, the Mercer County Commission on Abused, Neglected and Missing Children sponsors a multidisciplinary team (MDT) training to help social service agencies, law enforcement, prosecutors, school officials and others who first encounter child abuse and other issues that adversely affect youth. This fall, the MDT training will focus on gangs, informing these entities of what to do after a youth has been identified as gang related or affiliated. Members from the Mercer County Human Services Gang Prevention and Intervention Task Force will work with the MDT planning committee to ensure that the program will uphold the integrity of the task force's work and recommendations.

### **Mercer County Board of Chosen Freeholders and the Department of Human Services**

Through the Mercer County Freeholder Board and the Department of Human Services, Mercer County is supporting ACT – Adults and Children Together – Against Violence Coalition. This grassroots program, sponsored by PEI Kids, educates adults about violence and its impact on early childhood development, and teaches what all citizens can do to reduce violent behaviors by children, youth and adults. A key portion of this is to “saturate” the community because children spend time in different locations throughout it: child care, schools, houses of worship and public libraries.

A key element of the ACT Program's Community Saturation Model is two-day training sessions presented to health and human services providers who work with families of young children. At these sessions, participants learn how to disseminate information about: the relationship between developmental characteristics and young children's aggressive behavior; the roots and impact of violence in the lives of young children; and the developmental characteristics of young children that relate to early

violence prevention. In addition, the training covers four specific early violence preventions skills sets: anger management, social problem solving, discipline and media literacy. Those trained will pass the information and skills they have acquired to those who educate the county's children and the families who raise them. There are five "super trainers" or "master trainers" in Mercer; these people attended a three-day or four-day training to learn how to train other community members to be trainers. There are about 24 second-tier trainers, those who have attended a two-day training and who can present shortened seminar presentations within their sphere of reference, such as staff, parents and religious organizations.

Administrators of the ACT program plan to stage a countywide summit on childhood development and violence prevention techniques with a projected attendance of 225. This two-tiered summit is planned for October 8, 2005, at Rider University to highlight the community's effort to make early violence prevention highly visible in the community and to encourage community providers to collaborate in their efforts to address youth violence. The summit would target two primary adult audiences: providers who work with families of young children and those who educate and raise Mercer County children.

A second component to the training, oriented toward service providers/community resources, is being developed. Those developing the program would like to discuss the findings from the October summit at a Mercer County Youth Services Commission meeting, where many service providers are present. Additionally, a third component, focused on children, was added at the request of, and funding from, Mercer County. The plan is to provide a group of satellite forums at summer camps countywide in July and August. These would be to present parents, and ultimately service providers, youth's viewpoints and thoughts regarding violence.

## **Mercer County Environmental Health Office**

The Mercer County Health Officers' Association is attuned to gangs because violence is considered by many to be this nation's number one public health crisis. Recent discussions have revealed that local health departments are involved in gang/violence prevention in numerous ways, and health officers believe strongly that the following strategies must become more widely used:

- County health officers and/or the government in general should provide mentoring services to at-risk and gang youth and recruit volunteers from a human or social service agency to serve as mentors for youth.
- A one-stop youth center that addresses gang involvement and general delinquency with individual problem assessment, services, service referral and recreational activities should be created.
- County health officers and/or the government should establish a network of referral services to make it easier for youth and their parents/guardians to access resources.

- County health officers and/or the government in general also should regularly screen for and treat or refer patients to agencies that address alcohol and drug abuse issues, and strengthen the documentation of abuse and histories of family violence in individual and group records.
- County health officers and/or the government should advocate for public policies and resources that address the sources of violence, and promote the use of family-based strategies, and incorporate counseling and therapy services for the family in existing programs working with youth.

### **Mercer County Prosecutor's Office**

Due to the gang issue in the county, the Mercer County Prosecutor's Office is addressing this priority in four ways: intelligence gathering; community education directed at students, parents, teachers and community organizations; staffing; and prosecution.

An assistant prosecutor with the Mercer County Prosecutor's Office has been cross-designated as an assistant United States attorney, and one sergeant and two detectives have been assigned to its Gang Unit, which was formed earlier this year. Their primary function is detailed as an intelligence-gathering unit working closely with the Trenton Police Department, New Jersey and Mercer County Departments of Corrections and the New Jersey State Police. This group is referred to as the Mercer County Gang Task Force.

Biweekly meetings of the gang task force are conducted and gang intelligence from each of these agencies is exchanged, disseminated and analyzed, ultimately being logged into a sharable database. This information is available to any of the law enforcement agencies within Mercer County, as well as surrounding counties, as needed. The prosecutor's office amassed much of its information on gang activity by conducting surveillances and photographing gang members at gang-related funeral services, as well as other gatherings, such as the Puerto Rican Day parades and other events that would suggest that a concentrated gathering of gang affiliates would be present.

Recently, in conjunction with the Mercer County Chiefs of Police Association, the Mercer County Gang Task Force has taken a proactive approach to gang interdiction and suppression. Each police department has dedicated personnel to the task force, and members of the task force patrol the streets in the county looking for gang activity.

The office's detectives, as well as detectives from the Trenton Police Department, regularly travel throughout the city and surrounding jurisdictions to photograph and document spray-painted graffiti of gang origin and identifiers associating specific gang affiliations with specific sections of the city. This graffiti, commonly referred to as "tagging," is the newspaper of the streets and provides a great deal of information to law enforcement. The Mercer County Prosecutor's Office photographs and identifies as many gang members as physically possible to complement its intelligence files for future reference. In addition, the office attempts to interview and interrogate all known gang

members, postarrest, to obtain intelligence information and to possibly elicit their cooperation as a confidential informant to infiltrate the gang organization.

The Mercer County Prosecutor's Office also has implemented an educational initiative in cooperation with all the local law enforcement agencies. The prosecutor's office seeks to disseminate the most up-to-date intelligence on gang activity throughout the county. To this end, the office hosted a gang seminar at Mercer County Community College in September 2004, which was attended by about 180 officers from Mercer County. The prosecutor's office, the Trenton Police Department, the New Jersey Juvenile Justice Commission, the New Jersey Department of Corrections and the New Jersey State Police provided instructors for this seminar. Additional seminars are slated for the future to provide the Mercer County law enforcement community with up-to-date information on gang-related trends and their presence in each of the jurisdictions within the county.

In addition to educating the county's law enforcement officers about the county's gang problem, it is necessary that this information be made readily available to school authorities. The prosecutor's office sees increasing gang activity occurring in Mercer County schools and must combat this by educating teachers, administrators, counselors and parents with up-to-date intelligence, guidance and assistance on this issue. As a result, the prosecutor's office has undertaken two initiatives to address this problem.

The office has started a monthly gathering aimed at addressing the county school problem in addition to the countywide quarterly law enforcement gang program. This meeting is for the benefit of all county school resource officers, who are mandated to attend. Also invited are representatives from all local police departments who desire the latest update on gang activities in schools. The prosecutor's office's countywide gang experts provide the latest intelligence information to the resource officers, allowing them to be much better equipped to deal with gang-related problems in their respective schools.

In February 2005, a seminar was held for school administrators, teachers and social service/probation providers; more than 150 people attended this seminar. Detailed information disseminated at the seminar was geared to increasing the awareness of the gang problem combined with suggestions and recommendations on how to prevent students from becoming involved in gangs.

This type of seminar has been conducted on numerous occasions at the prosecutor's office's annual law enforcement and education convocation as well as its annual education convocation. In addition, the office has partnered with the Hamilton Municipal Alliance Committee to host a series of gang awareness presentations for parents at three Hamilton middle schools. These presentations focused on the warning signs of gang activity, prevention measures and basic terminology.

Finally, the Mercer County Prosecutor's Office and the Juvenile Justice Commission have partnered with Trenton Weed and Seed; the Trenton Board of Education; the Trenton Municipal Alliance Committee; the Trenton Council of Civic Associations; and the Trenton Department of Recreation, Natural Resources and Culture for gang

awareness programs for service providers, businesses, community leaders/groups, employees, and concerned citizens.

To increase its effectiveness in dealing with the gang problem, the Mercer County Prosecutor's Office has hired Detective Frank Clayton, a recognized authority on street gangs, to work with its Gang Unit. Det. Clayton has lectured extensively to numerous law enforcement, civic and educational groups, and is considered one of the foremost experts on gang-related activities in the state. His presence will enable the office to move forward in its efforts to combat gang crime in Mercer County.

In addition to its intelligence and educational efforts, the Mercer County Prosecutor's office has taken steps on the prosecution side to identify known gang members as they proceed through the criminal justice system. If an applicant to the Drug Court or the Pre-Trial Intervention Program has gang affiliations, his or her application will be denied. In addition, prosecutors will pursue higher bails for criminal suspects.<sup>13</sup>

The office also is working with the United States Attorney's Office in the referral of gun-related cases involving gang members. In many instances, the federal sentences exceed those of the state courts. As a general proposition, all defendants with gang affiliations will be dealt with more severely regardless of the level of crime they have been charged with committing.

### **Mercer County Sheriff's Office**

On the streets, the Mercer County Sheriff's Office has taken an active role in the Mercer County Gang Task Force, joining forces with the Prosecutor's Office and the Trenton Police Department. Since the task force was formed at the end of March 2005, sheriff's officers consistently have conducted raids to strip the streets of guns and drugs. Drugs constitute the top source of income for gangs, and it is not unusual for gang members to carry guns. As of July 15, 2005, eight sheriff's officers have been on street investigations in eight-hour shifts for at least 30 assignments — a total of more than 2,000 hours of manpower. These investigations continue on a regular basis. In addition, Mercer County Sheriff Kevin C. Larkin recently announced the creation of gang "tipline"; residents with information regarding crime can share this information confidentially with county law enforcement by calling (609) 989-6130.<sup>13</sup>

Off the streets, the sheriff's office also works hard to combat gang activity. The office has created an intelligence unit of five officers who meet weekly to exchange gang information and disseminate the information to other agencies. In addition, the office has created and distributed a brochure, in English and in Spanish, regarding programs on gangs for parents and teachers. These educational programs discuss issues such as gangs and bullying.

The Mercer County Sheriff's Office has extended its gang education programming to county employees, residents, and students. Sheriff's officers have trained all superior court judges and all of the judges' staff members, as well as many municipal judges. In addition, the office offered these programs to all employees at both Mercer County

courthouses; most employees attended. All student interns took part in the training as well.

In addition, sheriff's officers have trained everyone in the Mercer County Probation Department as well as many youth service groups within the County, including the Juvenile Justice Commission volunteers, CYO camp leaders, Boys & Girls Club camp leaders and teachers, the eighth graders of Crockett Middle School in Hamilton, Family Services and Shiloh Baptist Church. As of July 15, 2005, task force members from the sheriff's office were training the Ewing Police Department. Sheriff Larkin personally offered training to all superintendents of education in Mercer County; some have expressed interest in receiving this training when the 2005-2006 school year begins.

### **Mercer County Workforce Investment Board and One-Stop Career Center**

The Workforce Investment Board (WIB) & One-Stop Career Center provide in-school and out-of-school youth services by way of contractual outsourcing and internal programming. Through the annual request for proposal (RFP) process, proposals are solicited from various community and public agencies to provide services to prepare eligible youth for the attainment of basic and/or work readiness skills; attainment of a secondary school diploma or GED; and/or placement and retention in postsecondary education, military service, employment or apprenticeship. WIB and One-Stop annually receive roughly \$650,000 in funds.

Under the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) an eligible youth is defined as an individual who is:

- 14 to 21 years of age
- A low-income individual
- Within one or more of the following categories: deficient in basic literacy skills; a school dropout; a homeless, runaway or foster child; pregnant or parenting; an offender; an individual who requires additional assistance to complete an educational program, or to secure and hold employment; and a citizen or a registered alien. Males ages 18 through 21 also must be registered with Selective Service.

The WIA youth populations are divided into two groups: in-school and out-of-school youth. In-school youth are those who, although enrolled in an academic or vocational program (including alternative school), are at risk of failing or dropping out of school for an array of reasons. Out-of-school youth are not enrolled in any academic or vocational program (at time of registration) and are unemployed or underemployed.

Both populations, although at different stages in their young lives, need similar services to become successful as independent adults. The intensity of the services as well as the approaches needed, however, can vary immensely. One-Stop youth programs must

address the issues of peer pressure, self-esteem, coping skills and self-advocacy while addressing basic workplace skills and educational advancement. One-Stop youth programming strives to teach young people how to successfully navigate through the myriad of services and activities available to them and to make the most of their opportunities.

In addition, the Youth Council Committee of the county's Workforce Investment Board sponsored a summer job fair on June 8, 2005, in an attempt to address this same issue. This committee is putting together a strategy not only to develop job opportunities for youth, but also how to market "lower paying" jobs to youth in an attractive manner.

### **The Corporate Response**

One of the issues that the youth brought up in the county's youth forum in relation to gang involvement was the attraction to "fast money." The presence of more job opportunities for young people would thus prove instrumental in reducing the allure of gangs. To this end, officials from the Mercer County Department of Human Services met with the heads of the Mercer Chamber of Commerce, the Princeton Chamber of Commerce and the Metropolitan Trenton African American Chamber of Commerce and expressed the desire to see the corporate community provide more seasonal and year-long job opportunities for youth. Together, a survey was formulated and distributed at a May luncheon meeting.

The following recommendations are grouped into two categories: community and government. These designations indicate where the primary impetus should be for implementation of each recommendation, however, a community-based response system remains the most effective strategy for combating gang activity. Parents and families — together with schools, community-based organizations, public officials, civic groups and houses of worship — all need to work together to create solutions for at-risk youth.

## **Recommendations for Community Action**

### **1. Mobilize the community to reach a goal of engaging a minimum of 5,000 Mercer County youth over the next year in existing quality, community-based programming and healthy relationships with caring adults.**

Researchers have found that those youth attracted to gangs report less communication with and attachment to their parents. In turn, gang members also tend to lack the social skills and self-esteem possessed by their peers. Beginning from an early age, we need to encourage and develop opportunities for youth to establish healthy relationships with caring adults when their families do not provide that support. Proven, research-based models also should be promoted and implemented in Mercer County.

- The Mercer County Department of Human Services will promote, fund and monitor best practice models on gang prevention programs across the county. The department also will support such model programs by offering technical assistance on selected models. Mercer County officials strongly encourage other government agencies to adopt the same strategy.
- The Mercer County Youth Services Commission will conduct a survey to determine how many unduplicated youth are linked already to existing programs, and thus, identify the number of additional youth who must be reached to meet our goal. A communitywide action plan will be formulated to assure the linkage of 5,000 youth to caring adults through one-on-one mentoring, group programming and recreational activities, under the motto: “Caring Adults Make the Difference.”
- The Mercer County Department of Human Services will promote elements of the Boys and Girls Club of America’s Gang Prevention Through Targeted Outreach model. There are two tiers to the model starting with community readiness: community assessment, preparing your organization, evaluation and seeking additional resources. The second tier is implementation of the targeted outreach model: community mobilization, recruitment of youth to prevention programs, mainstreaming and case management. Recruitment of youth is conducted through referrals and street outreach. This model is considered a “promising approach” by Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Program (OJJDP) and is founded on a youth development philosophy and strategy known as BUIC:
  - ❖ **Belonging** – Young people know they are welcome and feel that they “fit” in and are accepted.
  - ❖ **Usefulness** – Young people know the satisfaction of doing something of value for others.

- ❖ Influence – Young people know their opinions are heard and valued, and that they can influence decisions.
- ❖ Competence – Young people feel proud and confident when they acquire new skills and know they can do something and do it well.

In this model, the youth development strategy is used by program staff to build relationships with youth and, ultimately, to develop youths' character (traits such as love, trust, commitment, compassion, care and responsibility). Clever and fun "interest-based" programming should be used to attract the youth to programming so that their needs can be addressed. Some examples of interest-base programming are: Stylin' and Profilin', a program where youth design t-shirts and learn about the fashion industry, culminating in a fashion show televised on a cable access channel; LAP (Learning and Performing) Dance, an instructional dance program where youth design and put on a music show; Breaking Eggs, a nutritional cooking program where youth get to eat all that they prepare; and Get Connected, a computer program that helps youth trace their genealogies. Case management, through monthly tracking, is used to monitor and document a youth's progress and participation in four areas: school, club programming, family and juvenile justice/law enforcement (if that is an issue). This model relies heavily on constant contact with youth and keeping thorough notes to document activities, progress, linkages and needs/interests. The model can be used by any youth-serving agency and is not restricted to use only by Boys and Girls Clubs.

## **2. Create a help line for parents who have questions and need resources related to gang prevention/intervention.**

The community has expressed great concern that there is no place where information on gangs is readily accessible. No clearinghouse for information exists, and families do not know whom to contact if they suspect their child may be a gang member or prospective recruit.

- Cluster information on gang-related programming for youth as a resource for families through the 211 system via telephone and online.
- Train 211 staff to field community phone calls related to gang topics beyond programming, such as gang signs, what to do if you suspect your child is in a gang, etc.

## **3. Create opportunities for youth forums across the county.**

The youth with whom we consulted during the task force's work made it very clear that they feel adults do not listen to them. They requested that more opportunities be made available for them to express their feelings and needs. Again, this is a way for youth to feel engaged and validated, and, as documented by research, contributes to positive youth development.

- Work with organizations like PEI Kids and the ACT Coalition to sponsor youth forums across the county to give youth the opportunity to be heard.
- Propose a Gang Awareness Week in October through the Youth Services Commission where youth groups affiliated with community-based organizations countywide will engage in dialogues about gangs.
- Collaborate with the Mercer County Library System to host a series of Youth Speak-Out forums during the summer; partner with the Mercer County Youth Services Commission to sponsor a Teen Summit on Gangs in the fall; collaborate with the Mercer County Commission on Abused, Neglected and Missing Children, which is planning to sponsor a multidisciplinary team training conference on gangs for human services professionals in the fall; participate in the Traumatic Loss Coalition's conference targeting parents and clergy, which will emphasize techniques to build healthy relationships between caring adults and youth.

#### **4. Engage mental health and substance abuse treatment professionals in skill training for therapeutic interventions with gang members/families and parents who are striving to raise emotionally healthy, well-adjusted children who resist gangs.**

We need to nurture a family support structure in Mercer County for families affected by gang violence. Although Mercer County has excellent mental health and substance abuse resources, parents have very few places to turn for counseling and support services when affected by gang trauma. A recent survey of local agencies proves that therapists and counselors have not been trained in specific therapeutic gang intervention strategies.

- Encourage local providers to take advantage of state-of-the-art national training on effective therapeutic intervention models.
- Using existing Mercer County Department of Human Services and Economic Development dollars, and Title XIX Medicaid Rehab Option funding, hire outreach workers to engage gang-involved and at-risk youth, as tested in the Mesa Intervention and the Riverside Comprehensive Community demonstration projects.
- Raise awareness among Mercer County parents about research-tested parenting skills models and how to access local training and parent support programs. Programs that combine parent skills training with incentives, such as baby showers, gift certificates, food vouchers (including school supplies and free clothing, as well as formula and diapers), and access to government benefits like WIC and housing, tend to be successful at retaining parents until competencies

are reached. Three parenting skills training models are especially notable: EPIC, Culturally Sensitive Parenting/Effective Black Parenting and Strengthening Families. The latter two are taught in Mercer County.

- ✓ **EPIC** (Every Person Influences Children) is a national not-for-profit organization that provides effective programs and resources for parents, teachers and school administrators that help parents raise responsible and academically successful children. EPIC combines an award-winning parenting program with a school-based character education curriculum that offers leadership training in several areas. The Mercer County Department of Human Services will explore EPIC's adaptability to local areas.
- ✓ **Culturally Sensitive Parenting/Effective Black Parenting** is a nationally acclaimed parenting, skill-building program that provides tools and strategies on how to parent African American children, as well as children from other cultures, to become healthy, proud and capable individuals. The program helps foster effective family communication, healthy identities, positive self-esteem, extended family values and growth and development for children.
- ✓ **Strengthening Families** is a strategy that improves the well-being of families. It aims to achieve better outcomes for children by helping families meet their care, control and support responsibilities; improvements in families' abilities to resolve difficulties and problems, and maximize the outcomes and opportunities for their children; clearer definitions and better collaboration among health, education and welfare sectors locally and nationally; and better use of existing resources.

## **5. Request that local school districts develop a comprehensive action plan to respond to and prevent future gang activity in the schools – elementary through high school.**

Like the rest of the community, schools are struggling with the issues associated with gangs. Truancy, violence, poor academic performance, graffiti, high drop-out rates, and ethnic and cultural tensions can be corollaries to delinquency and gang violence. Schools need to adopt a comprehensive approach, coupling safety and security, curricular and co-curricular programming, and training/professional development of academic and administrative staff.

- Working through the Mercer County Superintendent of Schools' office, require that all Mercer County school districts develop a comprehensive gang prevention and response plan, in partnership with school resource officers (SROs), local law enforcement, the prosecutor's office and the social service community.
- Through the county's Traumatic Loss Coalition and local school districts, tap into national Project SERV (School Emergency Response to Violence) funds, aimed at

helping schools recover from traumatic events that disrupt the learning environment, such as shootings, stabbings, hate crimes committed against students or faculty, and gang violence.

- Encourage local school districts to develop multimodel, in-school programs that address the emotional, cognitive, behavioral and social needs of youth in a safe and productive environment. Key research-based elements are: mental health and crisis counseling, psycho-educational workshops, peer mentoring, academic and career development, and experimental learning activities (recreation and community service).
- Youth must be given the opportunity to bond with a positive peer group/culture where healthy and productive behaviors become the “norm.” Protective factors are enhanced when there is a relationship between a youth and a caring adult: all interactions are treated as therapeutic interventions; clear boundaries are set between staff and youth participants; staff model healthy behavior; and a “safe haven” is created for youth.
- Encourage all schools to adopt primary and secondary prevention strategies that target youth, ages 5 to 7 and 7 to 14, respectively with antiviolence conflict resolution and antigang curricula that address risk and protective factors, after-school and summer recreation, mentoring, youth development skill building, and risk identification.
- Schools should create specific suppression programming, including: hire school resource officers in high-risk schools; initiate antigraffiti programs and dress codes, if necessary; prevent loitering in school hallways and on school grounds; provide staff and parent awareness education; provide modified in-school suspension, truancy and drop-out prevention programs; provide prescriptive reentry service contracts for students suspended or expelled; and provide programming to build cultural awareness and civic respect.

## **6. In partnership with the corporate sector, develop employment and career opportunities for youth.**

The corporate sector has an important role to play concerning the gang issue. Ultimately, not only are they affected as private citizens, but their businesses also may be affected adversely if they do not become part of the solution. According to the various young people who participated in the focus group, the lure of “fast money” draws many boys and girls to join gangs. Available reports suggest that gang members have the highest drop out and/or school failure rates, and have the least appropriate employment skills and work attitudes. Not surprisingly, they also have been consistently ignored or excluded from available special education, training and work programs. The corporate sector must make a commitment to the creation of real career and employment opportunities for youth. Financial incentives from gainful employment may seem

lackluster in comparison to the lure of drugs and fast cash; gaining skills, a work ethic, valuable connections and resume building must all be stressed as strong incentives for entering the work force.

- Create partnerships with the corporate community to identify career and employment opportunities in local corporations for summer as well as during the academic year.
- Encourage the development of on-the-job mentors to address the issue of attachment, trust and performance.
- Together with local and county chambers of commerce, develop a “job bank” of opportunities for youth employment. Encourage employers to work with the Mercer County One-Stop to develop and participate in a series of professional workshops for youth that touch on a wide range of topics: interviewing skills, corporate work ethic, dressing for success, etc. Current labor market demand occupations in Mercer County are in the hospitality (culinary/hotel), hospital/medical care and logistics/warehousing industries.
- Create a one-stop career center for youth in Mercer County that incorporates education, mentoring, housing, referral, technology, on-site childcare, life skills training including reduction of risky behaviors, job readiness, access to training, on-the-job training, entrepreneurship opportunities, job placement, and case management. Research models indicate that gang members should be mainstreamed with all other youth job seekers. A special component, however, should be developed for older drop-outs, ages 16 to 24; marginal gang members, ages 15 to 18, who are still in high school; and hardcore gang members, 14 to 16 years old, who are early drop-outs. Programming must incorporate safety and supervision measures.

## **7. Target and expand prevention and first-time youth offender programs as a way to discourage gang involvement.**

Findings indicate that delinquency often precedes gang membership, and suggest that gang programs should not be limited to gang intervention or suppression. Therefore, we see an opportunity to work directly with those youth who have been identified as first-time offenders to decrease their chances of reoffending. More resources need to target young delinquents before they commit more serious crimes, as well as youth who are exhibiting high-risk behaviors.

- Fund programs that target first-time offenders, especially youth identified through the Juvenile Conference Committee (JCC) in Trenton, and those in suburban municipalities as well. Bring new resources, such as mentoring programs, to JCC-involved youth.

- Highlight and advertise Mercer County-funded violence and gang prevention, mentoring and first-time offender programs to raise parents' awareness of available resources and family supports.
- The Mercer County Department of Human Services will issue a Request for Proposals to support a proven gang prevention model program.

## **8. Create gang intervention approaches that focus on helping young people get out and stay out of gangs.**

No single intervention program or strategy can assist everyone who wants to leave a gang. The longer a person is a gang member, the more difficult it is for him or her to leave a gang, but it is not impossible. A prevailing myth suggests that the only way out of a gang is death, however, the key to leaving a gang rests with the member. He or she must desire to leave the “surrogate family”; a gang member cannot be forced to leave his or her gang. Some gang members choose to “jump out” of their gang. The jump-out ritual is similar to the jumping-in initiation, except that it can be more severe. Many go through this harsh ritual to maintain the respect of the gang after they leave. The U.S. Department of Education, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention has initiated a gang-reduction program in four communities across the United States. Its gang prevention model:

- 1) Targets active gang members, close associates and gang members returning from confinement.
  - 2) Requires aggressive outreach, ongoing recruitment and careful planning and coordination.
  - 3) Holds a multidisciplinary intervention team responsible for risk and needs assessment, intervention planning and monitoring.
  - 4) Frees the community from a source of crime and negative role model for children each time there is a successful intervention.
- Work with law enforcement and correction officials to develop prisoner reentry initiatives, such as Boston's Reentry Initiative, that identifies inmates with histories of violence, multiple firearms violations or gang involvement and requires them to work with mentors who help them develop plans to change their lives and move away from violence. They are offered a wide range of resources, including employment assistance, child support information and case management, as an alternative to stiff penalties they face if they return to gang activity and violence. On the whole in New Jersey, more resources must be devoted to reentry initiatives to lower recidivism and reoffending among parolees.
  - Identify social service and faith-based organizations that are willing to work with gang members and train them to provide a combination of proven intervention methods, such as tattoo removal; GED preparation and alternate high school placement; vocational training, employment preparation and job placement in high-demand occupations; counseling and mental health services focusing on

posttraumatic stress therapies; intensive supervision, such as probation or parole; and obtaining a valid driver's license.

# **Recommendations for Government Action**

## **1. Create a statewide and countywide gang task force.**

Although the gang issue appears almost every day in the local newspapers and weighs heavily on the minds of many residents of Mercer County, no organized, collaborative effort exists at the county or state level to address the issue. Although law enforcement is responding in the area of public safety and crime, and meetings have occurred with different sectors of the community, something is needed to bring together all segments of the county and state to develop a communitywide response to the gang issue.

### **Statewide Task Force**

- Request that the County Executive recommend to the Governor's Office the formation of a statewide task force with broad representation from 21 counties that would support collective recognition of the issue across the state. That way it would lessen the "stigma" for any one politician to address the issue, and strengthen the political will behind it. The main objectives of this task force will be to have an ongoing statewide dialogue concerning gangs that would lead to improvement in communication and coordination across the state, share best practices and proven models, examine and propose legislation regarding gang involvement, and identify gaps and leverage existing federal and state resources to support effective gang reduction strategies.

### **Countywide Task Force**

- Request that the County Executive convene a countywide task force to conduct an assessment of the gang problem and develop a plan that would include the identification of needs at the individual, family and community levels and address those needs with a coordinated, comprehensive response; inventory human and financial resources in the community; identify gaps and leverage existing resources to support effective gang-reduction strategies; apply the best research-based programs across appropriate age ranges, risk categories and agency boundaries; conduct team-oriented problem-solving; and encourage coordination and integration with federal, state and local entities, as well as across communities and program types.
- Through this task force, and in collaboration with local stakeholders, law enforcement, the social services community, the faith-based community and schools, the county must develop specific policies and procedures to achieve the immediate goal of suppression and intervention, and the ultimate goal of reducing youth gang involvement. Until models can be vigorously tested on a national level, the following core components are key in designing a general community response:
  - ✓ Assess the problem – Identify that a problem exists and pinpoint the manifest and underlying factors contributing to the problem. Consensus must be

developed on the definition of the youth gang problem. Another key component is data gathering and analysis.

- ✓ Organization and policy development – Strategies must be customized in a geographical area based on whether the gang problem is chronic or emerging. A full range of operational strategies must be planned, and appropriately ordered and prioritized. They also must be systemically integrated, as the youth gang problem has different but interrelated elements.
- ✓ Managing the collaborative process – Collaboration among all agencies and institutions that can help solve the problem is key. In many instances, new funding for programs is not the critical ingredient for change. Existing funding must be better coordinated and targeted, and agencies must be willing to cooperate with each other through ongoing dialogue and communication. Agencies must be held accountable for making sure the right programs are launched and the right youth are targeted for suppression, rehabilitative opportunities and prevention services.
- ✓ Goals and objectives – A balance must be established between strategies that focus on individual or family change and those that emphasize system change. Long-term, sustained efforts must target the most vulnerable and hard-core gang members.
- ✓ Relevant programming – Rationales for services, tactics or procedures must be systemically articulated and implemented. For example, some promising approaches:
  - Target, arrest and incarcerate gang leaders and repeat violent offenders.
  - Refer fringe members and their parents to youth services for counseling and guidance.
  - Provide preventive services for youth who are clearly at risk.
  - Include crisis intervention or mediation of gang fights.
  - Patrol community “hot spots.”
  - Ensure close supervision of gang offenders by criminal justice and community-based agencies.
  - Provide remedial education for targeted gang members, especially in middle school.
  - Provide job-training orientation, placement and mentoring for older youth.
  - Establish safe zones around schools.
  - Implement vertical prosecution, close supervision and enhanced sentences for hard-core gang members.
  - Foster coordination and community participation.

- ✓ Community mobilization – A mobilized community is the most promising way to deal with the gang problem.
- ✓ Youth accountability – Youth gang members must be held accountable for their criminal acts, but they also must be provided with opportunities to change or control negative behavior. A range of options must be available to youth through the criminal justice system.
- ✓ Staff training – Training must be customized based on whether the gang problem is emergent or chronic in a given area and the type of work a staff person is conducting.
- ✓ Research and evaluation – When possible, strategies should be tested. Relatively little policy – or program-relevant research – exists to determine the best methods for lowering crime rates among gang members. Studies conducted by OJJDP have hypothesized that the interrelated application of strategies of community mobilization and provision of social opportunities, combined with suppression, organizational development, and social intervention, will lead to such a reduction, particularly of violence.
- ✓ Funding priorities – Funders must avoid funding simple or isolated programs of recreation, nonredirective counseling, street work or massive arrest and incarceration.
- Request that the task force be chaired by Freeholder Elizabeth Muoio and be comprised of representatives from Mercer County government agencies, such as law enforcement, sheriff's office, prosecutor's office, courts, schools, Department of Human Services, corrections and WIB/One-Stop; community-based organizations; clergy/faith-based organizations; municipal representation and corporations/businesses.

## **2. Examine, create and support legislation that addresses gang prevention, intervention and suppression.**

Legislation needs to be created and supported to address those individuals and programs focusing on the gang problem. This includes law enforcement, but it also should give other institutions in the community tools to support their efforts to curtail gang activity. Specifically, schools and municipalities need to have the ability to enact and enforce standards around loitering, curfews and dress codes. In addition, tougher legislation must be enacted to target adult gang members who recruit youth into delinquent activity.

- Encourage citizens to rally their legislators to introduce or support legislation that addresses the gang problem.

- State legislators and members of Congress should craft legislation that targets significant resources – not only to law enforcement’s suppression of gangs (although it is very important) – but to effective prevention, deterrence and intervention services. On the federal level, HR. 970 and its companion bill, S.155, the Gang Prevention and Effective Deterrence Act of 2005, as introduced in the two houses, contain very few social service methods to prevent or deter at-risk youth from joining illegal street gangs. Although the bills call for very harsh prosecutorial penalties for gang offenders, they only recommend one prevention-oriented investment: reauthorization of the G.R.E.A.T. (Gang Resistance Education and Training) program. More must be done.
- Support specific legislation introduced in the New Jersey State Legislature:
  - ✓ A879/S1213 requires boards of education to offer elementary school students instruction in gang violence prevention; this was referred to Assembly and Senate Education Committees in January 2004 and February 2004 respectively.
  - ✓ AR240 establishes a prison gang violence task force to study security and safety in state correctional facilities; this was passed by the Assembly in March 2005.
  - ✓ A2010 requires the Attorney General’s Office to provide annual gang education seminars for school administrators; this was referred to the Assembly Appropriations Committee in February 2005.

### **3. Encourage all public officials to advocate for funding to increase gang-related programming.**

The community has identified the need for more funding for youth programming – especially for mentoring and after-school programs that provide alternatives to gang activities, for training parents and professionals, for a public awareness campaign, and for career development and youth stipends. The U.S. Department of Education, except for small pockets, does not fund programs that serve youth older than age 12. Youth ages 13 to 16 not engaged in after-school and summer activities face some of the greatest risks of being recruited by gangs. Working parents who are not able to be with their children at crucial hours need quality programs that provide safety at their disposal. Additional funding also is needed for law enforcement, schools and economic incentives for youth and families.

- Public officials need to demonstrate political will, and should become “champions for children” by advocating for increased funding at all levels.
- Advocate for a more generous federal commitment to funding co-curricular and after-school programming for teens.

- Gaps in funding should be identified, as well as the need for quality programs to fill those gaps. Previously untapped pockets of funding should be explored. Officials should convince funders that this is a communitywide, public safety, quality-of-life issue, with the potential for extreme future impact.

#### **4. Create a countywide transportation system for youth to attend social service and recreational programs that cross municipal boundaries.**

Transportation continues to be a major stumbling block as it relates to youth and youth programming in this county. Not only do the majority of youth not drive, but if they do, they do not own cars. Furthermore, public transportation does not cover all geographic areas of the county. As a result, youth are marginalized to using only those programs and activities offered in their immediate areas. A countywide transportation system for youth would enable them to access new opportunities otherwise unavailable to them.

- Convene exploratory meetings with TRADE, the Mercer County Department of Transportation and Parks Commission, the Trenton SCOOP program and NJ Transit to discuss the feasibility of replicating the SCOOP model countywide.
- Explore potential funding opportunities at the county, state and federal levels.

#### **5. Promote the use of evidence-based practice models among social service providers to prevent gang involvement and violence.**

Government dollars for social service programs are scarce and continue to be cut every day. As guardians of the public trust, it is imperative that we make a sound investment in services. Although little research has been conducted linking specific programming elements to gang prevention, there are well-documented service approaches that have been successful nationwide in related areas, such as violence, delinquency and substance abuse prevention. Successful intervention approaches have included data gathering and analysis, swift criminal justice consequences, immediate access to a wide range of programs and services, and close monitoring and accountability.

- Mercer County officials will require gang-related programming to incorporate proven methods such as those documented by the OJJDP: Botvins Life Skills Training (LST), Project Towards No Drug Abuse (TDF), Nurse-Family Partnership, Multisystemic Therapy (MST), Promoting Alternative THinking Strategies (PATHS), Strengthening Families and Project Ceasefire, among others.
- Local agencies, with the help of Mercer County, must adapt a three-step process to ensure successful implementation of “blueprint” programs:

- ✓ Need for a program must be assessed—success involves more than simply selecting effective programs and importing them into a school or agency. Needs assessments should include an overview of programs already being implemented in the area. Rather than having several redundant programs, a school or community should consider a comprehensive package of programming that is appropriate for each developmental stage and that can meet local needs.
  - ✓ Communities must learn about empirically documented programs. Once a community or school has a good idea of the degree and type of risk, programs that match local need must be identified. An information search of programs can begin with the lists of effective programs identified by various federal agencies, such as the OJJDP. The Blueprints website ([www.colorado.edu/cspu/blueprint](http://www.colorado.edu/cspu/blueprint)) can be consulted.
  - ✓ Practitioners must choose a program that fits the need and the target population. Many research-based programs are being implemented for populations for which they were never intended, and for which research has not proven their effectiveness. For example, LST (a universal drug prevention program) should be implemented with whole classrooms and not with populations of drug-addicted youth for whom the program has not been targeted.
- Implement a Structured Day Reporting and Treatment Program by the Mercer County Department of Human Services to target youth on probation, many of whom are at risk for gang involvement.
  - On a broader scale, partner with the Attorney General’s office and local law enforcement to implement the Mercer County Safer Cities Initiative, modeled on the successful Greater Newark Safer Cities Initiative (GNSCI) program. With the Rutgers Police Institute serving as neutral convener, it is a partnership among criminal justice and government agencies, community leaders, social service providers, clergy, and private business. Examining crime data on violent offenders and at-risk youth on probation is a key analytical element of the GNSCI.
  - Adopt in Mercer County the Five Promises Checklist developed by America’s Promise: Caring Adults, Safe Places, Healthy Start, Marketable Skills and Opportunities to Serve.
    - ✓ Caring Adults – Ongoing relationships with caring adults – parents, mentors, tutors or coaches – offer youth support, care and guidance.
    - ✓ Safe Places – Safe places with structured activities during nonschool hours provide both physical and emotional safety for youth.

- ✓ Healthy Start – Adequate nutrition, exercise and health care pave the way for healthy bodies, healthy minds and smart habits for adulthood.
- ✓ Marketable Skills – Marketable skills through effective education help youth successfully navigate the transition from school to work.
- ✓ Opportunities to Serve – Opportunities to give back through community service enhance self-esteem, boost confidence and heighten a sense of responsibility to the community.

## **6. Develop a comprehensive training, education, and public awareness plan.**

The human services community clearly voiced a need for training of their professionals. School officials also have expressed a need for training, not only for teachers but also for parents. Education and public awareness are needed sorely across the county. Although law enforcement has been dealing with the issue for some time and thus already has some expertise, service professionals and parents need more specialized training in gang recognition and support for youth who are considering joining a gang, or already are involved. Special emphasis on training and public education should be given to immigrant and non-English speaking communities that are especially at risk.

- Research and bring training resources to the county in support of parents and professionals who interact with youth on a daily basis by using master trainers in the areas of recognition, prevention, intervention and suppression.
- Evaluate existing gang literature and create new educational materials, such as handbooks, pamphlets, websites and brochures, with appropriate messages; partner with county-funded agencies and community organizations, such as libraries, to distribute information. Make all materials available in Spanish, as well as all other relevant languages.
- Create a “speakers’ bureau” within the Mercer County Department of Human Services by training department staff to educate the community about gang prevention and intervention strategies, national research findings and proven community mobilization methods.
- Work with the New Jersey Department of Human Services to train local service personnel, as well as staff of therapeutic foster homes, residential facilities, group homes and the New Jersey Department of Youth and Family Services, to assess youth for risk of gang involvement, identify warning signs of gang affiliation and link families/workers with preventive and intervention resources available in Mercer County and across the state for youth who are placed out of county.

- Direct the New Jersey Department of Human Services Training Academy to educate resource families and DYFS Resource Family Support Workers about working with gang-involved youth and families. In addition, create a permanent component on gang prevention and intervention for the DYFS Resource Family Training program.
- Educate the newly created county-based Child Welfare Planning Councils about gangs and prioritize the use of state prevention funds for “positive youth development” programming.
- Identify key community leaders, such as PTA members, residents involved in neighborhood watch groups, grassroots volunteers and civic association participants, and educate them about gangs. Mobilize them to take action in their neighborhoods by reporting suspicious behavior, teaching others about getting involved, compiling a parent telephone tree list with concerned parents, monitoring school campuses and bus stops, and using parents to teach other parents communication and conflict resolution skills to use with children.
- In coordination with the Mercer County Gang Prevention and Intervention Task Force and the Mercer County Department of Human Services, solicit funding to train all Mercer County Youth Service Commission member agencies and those receiving county youth funding in OJJDP’s Title V Three Year Delinquency Prevention Plan technical assistance program. This comprehensive training teaches youth-serving agencies to conduct community resource assessments (CRAs), which inventory existing community resources, address priority risk factors and help identify assets and gaps in needed services. The training emphasizes the use of model programs’ performance measurement. It focuses on reducing risk factors for delinquency and increasing protective factors in multiple domains: the community, family, school and individual/peer group.

## **7. Build closer ties between law enforcement and social service communities.**

Law enforcement and the social service community approach the gang problem very differently. If these two entities work collaboratively, however, they can exert a greater and more lasting impact on gang activity in Mercer County. Structured settings that allow for more open and ongoing communication between law enforcement and social service professionals must be established.

- Establish ongoing meetings, mandated at the highest levels, with representation from the Mercer County Department of Human Services, probation, Mercer County Sheriff’s Office, MDT, the Juvenile Justice Commission and the New Jersey Department of Law and Public Safety, that will stress communication and collaboration.

- Produce a joint brochure and public service announcement for the community that demonstrates a unified strategy in addressing the gang problem.
- Implement the “Village Initiative” in Mercer County, which joins probation officers, local law enforcement and human services professionals. The initiative aims to increase the visibility of the Probation Department in the community, better identify the needs of probationers and their families, and reduce violations of probation (VOPs.)
- Establish a partnership between the Mercer County Department of Human Services and the Mercer County Prosecutor’s Office to conduct community-based seminars that focus on law enforcement strategies and gang culture, as well as prevention programs and intervention strategies that go beyond recognition and identification of gang colors and symbols.

## **8. Establish healthy and constructive relationships with the local media.**

Due to the recent proliferation of gang activity in Mercer County, the local media devotes at least one article daily to the subject. The majority of the articles shed a very negative light on the issue, and often instill fear in the general public. An ongoing, constructive relationship with local media must be established so that both the media and the county government can focus on constructive solutions and positive outcomes.

- Convene a group representative of county government, schools, law enforcement, parents and youth, and community groups to develop a strategy for a constructive media campaign around the gang issue in our county.
- Meet with local print media editors to discuss the gang situation and together strategize about a series of articles that will focus on programs that have exerted a positive impact on community youth.
- Inventory local TV/cable outlets that would run public services/educational segments related to the gang issue.
- Work with Mercer County Community College and county law enforcement to develop a media spot that would focus on informing parents as well as a short program that would send a clear message to youth about the negative consequences of becoming involved with a gang.

**Endnotes:**

1. National Alliance for Gang Investigators Associations website.
2. Florida Department of Corrections website.
3. Press release from White House dated February 2, 2005.
4. Ibid.
5. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Bulletin, April 1999.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. "Introduction to East Coast Gangs," found on National Alliance for Gang Investigators Associations website.
9. Ibid.
10. Mercer County Corrections Gang Intelligence Unit, June 2004.
11. *The Trentonian*, Wednesday, December 22, 2004
12. 2005 National Gang Threat Assessment.
13. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Bulletin, April 1999.
14. 2005 National Gang Threat Assessment.
15. John Duarte, Social worker, Mercer County Youth Detention Center.
16. [www.knowgangs.com](http://www.knowgangs.com).
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. 2005 National Gang Threat Assessment.
20. Ibid.
21. "Almighty Latin King Nation," found National Alliance of Gang Investigators Associations website.
22. 2005 National Gang Threat Assessment.
23. [www.gripe4rkids.org](http://www.gripe4rkids.org).
24. *The Times of Trenton*, Tuesday, March 29, 2005.
25. Ibid.
26. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Bulletin, December 2001.
27. University of Colorado at Boulder website ([www.colorado.edu](http://www.colorado.edu) - CSPV website).
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Bulletin, April 1999.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid.
37. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Bulletin, December 2001.
38. Search Institute website.
39. Ibid.

# GANG INFORMATION

## RESOURCES ON GANGS Mercer County Library System

### Book Titles in the Mercer County Library System

- Edgar, Kathleen. *Youth Violence, Crime and Gangs: Children at Risk*, 2004. Y 303 EDG
- Gedatus, Gus. *Gangs and Violence*, 2000. Y 366.1 GED
- Rodriguez, Luis J. *Hearts and Hands: Creating Community in Violent Times* New York: Seven Stories Press, 2001. (This title is owned by Mercer County Community College, James Kearney Campus, and may be borrowed through MCLS.)
- Roleff, Tamara L. *What Encourages Gang Behavior?* 2002. Y 364.1066 WHA
- Shelden, Randall G. *Youth Gangs in American Society*, 2004 364.1 SHE
- Hayden, Tom, *Street Wars : Gangs and the Future of Violence*, 2004 364.1 HAY
- Lloyd, J.D., editor *Gangs*, 2002 Y 364.1 GAN
- Donahue, Sean, editor *Gangs : Stories of Life and Death from the Streets*, 2002 364.106 GAN
- Egendorf, Laura K., editor *Gangs : Opposing Viewpoints*, 2001 Y 364.1066 GAN
- Chesney-Lind, Meda and John M. Hagedorn *Female Gangs in America*, 1999 364.1 FEM
- Sachs, Steven L. *Street Gang Awareness : a Resource Guide for Parents and Professionals*, 1997 364.1 SAC
- Landre, Rick *Gangs : a Handbook for Community Awareness*, 1997 364.1066 LAN
- Mintzer, Richard *Coping with Random Acts of Violence*, 2004 Y 303.6 MIN

## Useful Websites

**Addressing Community Gang Problems:  
A Model for Problem Solving**  
<http://www.ncjrs.org/txtfiles/156059.txt>

**Gang Suppression and Intervention:  
Problem and Response**  
<http://www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles/gangprob.pdf>

**National Alliance of Gang Investigators**  
[http://www.nagia.org/2005\\_national\\_gang\\_threat\\_assessment.pdf](http://www.nagia.org/2005_national_gang_threat_assessment.pdf)

**National Youth Gang Center bibliography of  
Gang Literature**  
<http://www.iir.com/nygc/publications/biblio.pdf>

**National Youth Gang Center online  
publication links**  
<http://www.iir.com/nygc/PublicationLinks.htm#YGS>

**Parents site for Signs of Gang Activity or  
Involvement**  
<http://www.gangwar.com/>

**Parents With Dignity Organization**  
<http://www.warningsigns.info/>

**GANGINFORMATION.COM**  
<http://www.ganginformation.com/>

**Information on Gang Structures**  
<http://www.gangout.com/about-gangs.htm>

**City of Joliet, IL Web Site Gang Involvement**  
<http://www.ci.joliet.il.us/JPDGangs.htm#Reasons%20for%20Involvement>

**Female Gangs: A Focus on Research**  
[http://www.ncjrs.org/html/ojjdp/jjbu2001\\_3\\_3/contents.html](http://www.ncjrs.org/html/ojjdp/jjbu2001_3_3/contents.html)

**Gangs and At-Risk Kids**  
<http://www.gangsandkids.com/>

**Parents in Crisis: Gangs**

**National Youth Gang Center**  
<http://www.iir.com/nygc>

**Office of Juvenile Justice  
and Delinquency Prevention**  
<http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org>

**New Jersey's Online  
Gang Free Community**  
<http://www.njgangfree.org>

**Understanding Gang Slang**  
<http://www.gangsorus.com>

**Charter of GANGINFO**  
<http://www.iir.com/nygc/listCharter.htm>

**National Alliance of Gang Investigators  
Associations Links**  
<http://www.nagia.org/Links.htm>

**Information for those Involved with Gangs**  
<http://www.gangstyle.com>  
<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/4111/nogangs.html>

**Gang Awareness Page for Parents, Educators  
and Law Enforcement**  
<http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/Bluffs/9341>

**Gang Resistance Education and Training  
Program (G.R.E.A.T. Program)**  
<http://www.great-online.org/>

**National Gang Crime Research Center**  
<http://www.ngcrc.com/>

**Gangs: Programs**  
<http://www.ncjrs.org/gangs/programs.htm>

**Gangs 101**  
<http://www.lincolnet.net/users/lrtrapp/block/gangs101.htm>

**National Youth Gang Center**

<http://www.iir.com/nygc/acgp/readings.htm>

**Articles**

Elliston, Jon, Monika Guttman, and Chitra Ragavan. "Terror on the Streets." U.S. News & World Report. 13 Dec. 2004: 20.

Pleasant, Betty. "Parents Might Be Arrested to Curb Gang Violence." New York Amsterdam News. 27 Jan. 2005: 36.

Robelen, Erik W. "First Lady to Lead Youth Initiative." Education Week. 9 Feb. 2005: 23.

Romano, Andrew. "Machetes on the Mean Streets." Newsweek. 28 Mar. 2005.

York, Michelle. "Taking the Streets Back From Gangs, One Merciless Step at a Time." New York Times 28 Feb. 2005, sec. B: 4.

**PUBLICATIONS AVAILABLE FREE OF CHARGE ONLINE**

Prevention (OJJDP) publication that analyzes the differing characteristics of gangs

<http://www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles1/ojjdp/191524.pdf>

**Modern-Day Youth Gangs.** Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency as they have developed over time. (12 pp; available in PDF format online; print copy available at Lawrence Branch)

<http://www.iir.com/nygc/PublicationLinks.htm#YGS>

**National Youth Gang Center Online Publication Links.** This page offers access to online publications in various categories, and includes links to bulletins published as part of the OJJDP's *Youth in Action Series* and *Youth Gang Series*, as well as surveys and statistical analyses.

<http://www.iir.com/nygc/acgp/bulletins/Preventing.pdf>

OJJDP Bulletin: **Preventing Adolescent Gang Involvement** (12 pp.; available in PDF format online; print copy available at Lawrence Branch)

<http://www.scienceblog.com/community/older/1999/C/199902798.html>

**Teens Can Refuse Gang Membership without Serious Harm, Study Says;** article on consequences of refusing gang membership based on surveys conducted at Ohio State University.

[http://www.ncjrs.org/html/ojjdp/jjbul2001\\_3\\_3/contents.html](http://www.ncjrs.org/html/ojjdp/jjbul2001_3_3/contents.html)

**Female Gangs: A Focus on Research.** Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention bulletin issued March, 2001 sets forth the results of extensive research conducted on the nature, composition and proliferation of female gangs. The report is well documented and contains further references for additional research.

[http://www.ncjrs.org/html/ojjdp/summary\\_2000\\_8/programs.html](http://www.ncjrs.org/html/ojjdp/summary_2000_8/programs.html)

**Programs and Strategies.** The National Criminal Justice Reference Service site includes the full text of a report issued by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention on programs and strategies related to gang activity and proliferation.

<http://www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles1/nij/190351.pdf>

**Responding To Gangs: Evaluation and Research.** This is an extensive, 320-page report published in 2002 that synthesizes the results of research conducted over the past 10 years on gang organization, activity and proliferation. Various aspects of gang behavior and efforts at prevention of gang activity are described and evaluated.

<http://www.ngcrc.com/ngcrc/page10.htm>

**Preliminary Results of Project Gangmill.** This is a summary, in an easy to read, "bulletin" style, of the research compiled by the National Gang Crime Research Center on a variety of issues from surveys involving 3,500 respondents across seven states.

<http://www.ngcrc.com/ngcrc/page9.htm>

**Facts about Gang Life in America Today.** The National Gang Crime Research Center conducted interviews with approximately 4,000 gang members to learn more about their attitudes and gang activity. This 1997 report summarizes the results of their surveys.

<http://www.ngcrc.com/ngcrc/page13.htm>

**Gang Profile: The Gangster Disciples.** This extensive report on the growth and activities of the Gangster Disciples in Chicago is an excellent illustration of how gangs operate and consolidate power.

### Agencies

Mercer County Court House  
Sheriff Kevin C. Larkin  
175 South Broad Street  
Trenton, NJ 08650  
Phone: (609) 989-6111

Mercer County Department of Human Services  
April Aaronson, Director  
McDade Administration Building  
660 South Broad  
Trenton, NJ 08650-0068  
Phone (609) 989-6526

Mercer County Youth Detention Center  
Lionel W. Henderson, Director  
1440 Parkside Avenue  
Trenton, NJ 08638  
Phone (609) 434-4125

NJ Juvenile Justice Commission  
1001 Spruce Street PO Box 107 Suite 202  
Trenton, NJ 08625-0107  
Phone (609) 292-1400

Office of Attorney General  
New Jersey Department of Criminal Justice  
Richard J. Hughes Justice Complex  
25 Market Street PO Box 085  
Trenton, NJ 08625-0085  
Phone (609) 292-9064

U.S. Department of Justice  
Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention  
810 Seventh Street N. W.  
Washington, D.C. 20531  
Phone (202) 307-5911