



Identifying and Addressing the Gang Problem in Sampson County

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Sheriff Jimmy Thornton

OBJECTIVES:

- Look at a definition of a gang
- Look at prevention and intervention strategies
- Learn several indicators and risk factors of gangs in your community
- Explore tips of what can be done by parents, schools, and neighbors to prevent gang activity

WHAT IS A GANG?

- There is no nationally accepted definition, but most agree on the following elements:
 - – A group of three or more people
 - – These people share a common identifying sign, symbol, or name
 - – Gang members individually or collectively engage in an ongoing pattern of criminal or delinquent activity
 - – They are often between 12 and 24

NORTH CAROLINA'S GANG DEFINITION

- “a criminal street gang means any ongoing organization, association, or group of three or more persons, whether formal or informal, having one of its primary activities as the commission of a felony or violent misdemeanor offenses or delinquent acts that would be felonies or violent misdemeanors if committed by an adult, and having a common name or common identifying sign, colors or symbols”

Elements of the NC Definition

- Group of three or more
- The group commits criminal activity.
- The group has at least a common name, sign, color or symbol.

True Statements About Gangs and Gang Members

- Females represent 10% of the population nationally.
- Locking up gang members, especially the young ones, is like sending them to criminal college.
- Some gangs are integrated as to race and ethnic background.
- Gangs are a problem for everyone.

True Statements About Gangs and Gang Members (Cont.)

- Juveniles join gangs in order to give themselves a sense of family.
- Juveniles join gangs because of the lure of the fantasy lifestyle.
- Some individuals join gangs because of anger and rebellion against society.

TYPES OF GANGS

- Traditional gangs
- Business/profit gangs
- White hate gangs
- Copy-cat gangs
- Delinquent social gangs

CONDITIONS THAT ENABLE GANGS TO GROW

- Socializing agents are ineffective
- Abundance of free and unstructured time
- Limited exposure and access to good jobs and careers
- A place to congregate, a well-defined neighborhood



Do we have a gang problem?

Are our children at risk of joining a gang?



INDICATORS OF POSSIBLE GANG INVOLVEMENT

- Purchasing or desire to buy or wear clothing of all one color or style
- Changing appearance with special haircuts, eyebrow markings, or tattoos
- Using hand signs
- Gang graffiti on folders, desks, walls, and buildings
- Developing a bad attitude towards family, school, and authorities

INDICATORS OF POSSIBLE GANG INVOLVEMENT (Cont.)

- Withdrawing from family activities
- Changing friends; spending time with undesirable people
- Having more money or possessions
- Staying out later than usual
- Carrying weapons



HAND SIGNS



Hand signs are used to show allegiance to a specific gang.

SYMBOLS & TATOOS



Some gangs also use symbols to identify their gang. This gang is called “Mara Salvatrucha,” clique-Centrales.

TATTOOS (Cont.)



IS ALL GRAFFITI GANG RELATED?



- No, some is “Tagger” graffiti.
- More artistic in nature.

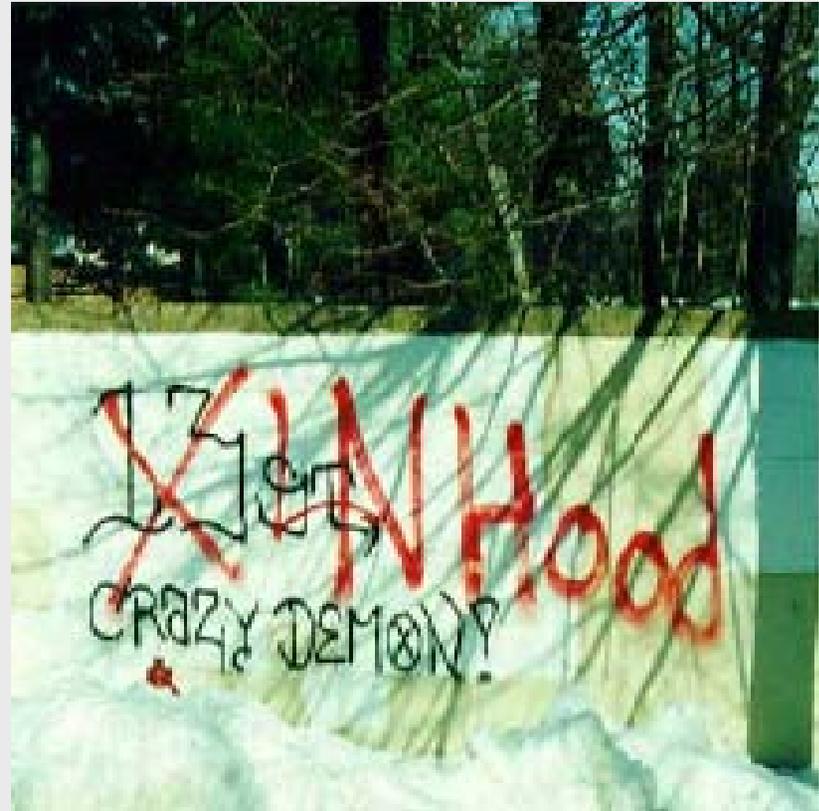
GANG GRAFFITI



Used to identify territory or turf.

GANG GRAFFITI (Cont.)

- Used to send messages.
- Gangs will paint over other gangs signs and symbols as a message of disrespect.



WHY DO INDIVIDUALS JOIN GANGS?

- Fun and excitement
- Identity and sense of belonging
- Peer pressure
- Financial gain/drugs
- Protection
- A family tradition
- A failure to understand what being in a gang means

WHO JOINS GANGS?

- Recruits generally range in age from 12 to 24 years
- Most members are boys, but 10 percent of all gang members are girls
- All ethnic groups and income levels are represented, and gangs are found in all parts of the country
- Certain risk factors increase the likelihood of gang involvement

ASSOCIATED RISK FACTORS

- Living in an area with a high level of gang activity, drug/alcohol use, available firearms
- Lack of a positive support system at home
- Violence against family members
- Exposure to TV shows, movies, and/or music that glorifies violence

ASSOCIATED RISK FACTORS

(Cont.)

- Lack of alternative activities, such as community youth programs
- Lack of positive role models
- Low self-esteem and/or a sense of hopelessness about the future
- Poor decision-making and communication skills
- Too much unsupervised free time

ASSOCIATED RISK FACTORS

(Cont.)

- Poor school achievement
- Problematic child-parent relationship
- Lack of respect for authority (parents, teachers, law enforcement officers)
- Family members who are or were gang members

RESPONDING TO A GANG PROBLEM

- Prevention
 - Primary and secondary
- Intervention
- Suppression
- Reentry



Tips



What Can Parents Do?



WHAT PARENTS CAN DO

- Be a positive role model.
- Do everything possible to involve your children in supervised, positive group activities.
- Praise your children for doing well and encourage them to do their very best.
- Get to know your children's friends and their parents.

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO (Cont.)

- Set limits for your children, and enforce them.
- Do not allow your children to dress in gang-style clothing, to practice gang hand signs, or to write gang graffiti on any surface, including their bodies. ***(It's not cute nor harmless!)***

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO (Cont.)

- Know where your children are at all times, and schedule activities to occupy their free time.
- Get involved in your children's education, and encourage them to stay in school. Be active in the PTA.
- Teach your children to set positive goals, to hold high standards, and to prepare for a positive future.

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO (Cont.)

- Explain to your children that only a very small percentage of youth join gangs.
- Help your children to understand the natural consequences of being involved in a gang.
- The more connected a child is with family, school, community, and positive activities, the less likely he or she will be attracted to gangs.

Tips

WHAT CAN SCHOOLS DO?



WHAT SCHOOLS CAN DO

- Identify at-risk students and students who are already gang members. Encourage them to participate in sports, drama, music, art, and other positive activities that will increase their confidence and sense of belonging.
- Don't allow anyone to wear gang clothing, paraphernalia, or other items associated with gang activity at school; don't permit gang hand signals.
- Photograph and remove all graffiti from the school grounds and property.

WHAT SCHOOLS CAN DO (Cont.)

- Promote after-school programs that address the prevention of violence.
- Work with parents, counselors, School Resource Officers, and school personnel to determine when intervention is necessary and what steps should be taken.
- Ensure that gang and drug prevention are part of the curricula, and present gang and drug awareness programs to parents.

WHAT NEIGHBORS CAN DO

- Get to know your neighbors and their children.
- Communicate.
- Maintain a standard for your neighborhood's appearance that tells gangs that they are not welcome.
- Work with your local law enforcement agency to develop a community strategy against gangs.

GETTING OUT OF A GANG

- Speak to a counselor, police officer, clergy, or other professionals about ways youth can create distance between themselves and the gang.
- Relocate.
- Get information about tattoo removal programs.

GANG RESOURCES

OJJDP Summary: Youth Gang Programs and Strategies (Howell, 2000)

www.iir.com/nygc/PublicationLinks.htm#YGPI

Addressing Community Gang Problems: A Practical Guide (BJA, 1998)

www.iir.com/nygc/PublicationLinks.htm#CAYG

GANG RESOURCES (Cont.)

G.R.E.A.T Programs
www.great-online.org

National Crime
Prevention Council:
Teens, Crime, and the
Community
www.ncpc.org/tcc

National Youth Gang
Center
www.irr.com/nygc

Latin American Youth
Center
www.layc-dc.org

National Youth Violence
Prevention Resource
Center
www.safeyou.org

NC Gang Investigators'
Association
www.ncgangcops.org

SPECIAL THANKS TO

Fairfax County, VA
Police Department
&

North Carolina Justice Academy
for much of the material in this
presentation

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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