

# **SAN MATEO COUNTY'S RESPONSE TO GANG VIOLENCE – AN OVERVIEW AND FUTURE OF THE SAN MATEO COUNTYWIDE GANG TASK FORCE**

## OVERVIEW

On August 8, 2005, the Countywide Issues Sub-Committee of the San Mateo County Police Chief's and Sheriff Association met at the Foster City Police Department to develop an on-going strategy to address the increase in gang violence throughout San Mateo County. During the meeting, it became apparent that the gang problem wasn't limited to certain cities or geographic areas, but widespread, touching just about every city and community in San Mateo County. The Police Chiefs present, including Undersheriff Greg Munks, believed that an on-going and coordinated enforcement effort was needed as soon as possible if San Mateo County law enforcement was to get control of this problem.

Based on this meeting, the Countywide Issues Sub-Committee tasked a group of senior law enforcement managers from the San Mateo Police Department, South San Francisco Police Department, Redwood City Police Department and the San Mateo County Sheriff's Office to develop a proposal for a Countywide Gang Task Force that would involve every law enforcement agency in San Mateo County, including the District Attorney's Office and Probation Department. State and federal law enforcement agencies such as California State Parole, California Highway Patrol, and the United States Customs and Immigration Service would also participate in this task force as needed.

Under the leadership of Supervisor Jerry Hill, Supervisor Rose Jacobs Gibson, County Manager John Maltbie and Sheriff Don Horsley, the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors approved the creation of a Sheriff's Gang Intelligence and Investigations Unit on September 27, 2005. This newly formed unit consists of one Sheriff's Sergeant, two Sheriff's Detectives, one Intelligence Analyst and one Deputy District Attorney. The two main goals of the unit are:

- 1) To become the centralized clearing-house of gang related programs, gang member information and a confidential hot line to report gang members and activities.
- 2) To conduct long-term investigations that target criminal street gangs by using a combination of traditional and non-traditional techniques (wire taps, surveillance etc.) to identify, prosecute and dismantle criminal organizations both in State and Federal Courts.

In addition, the Gang Intelligence Unit was designated to be the full-time support system for the newly formed Countywide Gang Task Force. The Gang Intelligence Unit compiles viable administrative searches for the field enforcement component of the Countywide Gang Task Force, collects and maintains all the gang member validation records, interviews/debriefs selective gang members, assists with day-to-day operations in the command post and assists in the record keeping and administrative reports for the Countywide Gang Task Force. The Sheriff's Gang Intelligence Unit is temporarily

located at the old Belmont Police Department and is the staging location and command post for the Countywide Gang Task Force.

On September 29, 2005, the Countywide Gang Task Force began operations for an eight week period (September 29-November 18<sup>th</sup>), 40 hours per week. During this time period, every police agency in the San Mateo County participated in the numerous enforcement operations, including other local, state and federal law enforcement agencies. During a normal deployment period, the Countywide Gang Task Force would field three strike teams (North-Central-South) consisting of one Captain (incident commander), one Lieutenant (officer in-charge), three Sergeants (Team Leaders), and approximately 30 Police Officers and Deputy Sheriffs. The initial mission of the Countywide Gang Task Force was:

- To restore order to all neighborhoods.
- To proactively enforce all laws, codes, and ordinances.
- To reduce the chances of violent and life threatening behavior.
- To treat each contact professionally and legally.
- To search every probationer and/or parolee (who have been identified as a high risk gang members), and their property.
- To identify current gang members, substantiate gang membership of new members, and confirm gang affiliation to those that have not met establish gang identification standards.
- To enhance probation and parole conditions for probationers and parolees who are affiliated with gang membership.
- To debrief each arrestee by Gang Investigators to gain intelligence and information on criminal activity.
- To validate new gang members and forward information to CALGANG representatives.
- To update information on established gang members and forward to CALGANG representatives.
- To work with the District Attorneys Office to vertically prosecute suspected gang members as appropriate.

The results of this eight week deployment period proved to be extremely successful. Besides enhancing the already close working relationships San Mateo County law enforcement currently enjoys, the Countywide Gang Task Force produced the following results:

- 162 adult arrests
- 32 juvenile arrests
- 42 parole violations
- 33 probation violations
- 46 warrant arrests
- 73 arrests for new charges
- 129 parole searches
- 160 probation searches

- 40 consent searches
- 3 search warrants issued
- 61 weapons seized (guns, knives etc)
- 46 agency assists (homicides, shootings, gang fights etc)
- 647 field contacts
- 424 field identifications
- 164 gang members identified
- 8802 personnel hours worked

Based on the success of this project, the San Mateo County Police Chiefs and Sheriff Association agreed to continue with the Countywide Gang Task Force once a week during the winter months. Currently, the Chiefs and Sheriff's Association is considering a full-time deployment (similar to the initial deployment in 2005) from May 15<sup>th</sup> - September 15<sup>th</sup> 2006. The majority of the resources have come from the local city Police Departments. During 2005, a conservative estimate of the city resources used to support the Countywide Gang Task Force totals approximately \$540,000.00.

#### FUTURE

All indications are is that the cities commitment to the Countywide Gang Task Force will continue at, or above, last year's levels. The cooperation between the Police Chiefs and Sheriff Association, County Commanders, and the Deputy Sheriffs/Police Officers involved in this project still remains high and should be considered a model for other Counties. Unfortunately, the infrastructure needed to support this on-going program and other gang related investigations is limited due to the lack of resources in the Sheriff's Gang Intelligence Unit. The unit was initially designed to include two city Police Officers and one Deputy Probation Officer to better coordinate the intelligence efforts between the cities and the county.

The Gang Intelligence Unit is currently handling all intelligence related to a large multi-city/county crime spree involving East Palo Alto gang members (on-going at this time), preparing and assisting with the preparation of several gang predicate reports for several cities in San Mateo County, and background packages for Stanislaus County Gang Intelligence Unit regarding a Sacramento Street (Sac Street) gang member (East Palo Alto) who attempted to kill a Turlock Police Officer and a East Palo Alto Police Officer in 2004. The unit is also preparing the gang predicated report and background information for the "Sac St. gang member who killed East Palo Alto Police Officer Richard May on January 7, 2006.

The Gang Intelligence Unit has already identified the top three criminal street gangs in San Mateo County, based on the gang's history of violence, sophistication, and mobility. The most notable gang in San Mateo County is the Sacramento Street Gang from East Palo Alto. Beginning in January 2006, the Sheriff's Gang Intelligence Unit formed a task force consisting of the California Department of Justice, East Palo Alto Police Department, Federal Bureau of Investigation, San Mateo County Narcotics Task Force,

and the Northern California High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) to disrupt and dismantle the Sacramento Street Gang.

To effectively and efficiently provide this service to San Mateo County law enforcement agencies, the Gang Intelligence Unit desperately needs to increase its staffing. The two city Police Officers would provide much needed surveillance and investigative capabilities (\$90,000.00 per officer). Currently, the unit is unable to conduct proactive surveillances that are crucial to any intelligence gathering operation. One such operation involves following gang members on probation and parole in attempts to identify other gang members and their associates not previously known. This often becomes invaluable following a gang related shooting or other acts of violence in bringing these criminals to justice.

The Deputy Probation Officer is also critical to the success of the Gang Intelligence Unit and the Countywide Gang Enforcement Task Force (\$106,000.00). The following are examples of how a Deputy Probation Officer assigned full-time to the unit can bring the Court's perspective to addressing the gang problem:

- Identify gang members who have been convicted and are awaiting sentencing
- Provide investigating probation officers with gang information on their subjects so they can relay this information to the court in the pre-sentence report
- Provide Gang Intelligence Unit current information on both juvenile and adult gang members who are placed on probation
- Provide list of Probationers to be contacted during the Gang Abatement Task Force Operations
- Ensure that the information gathered is current and accurate
- Act as probation liaison during Gang Abatement Task Force to ensure proper probation protocol is following during searches and contacts with adult and juvenile probationer
- Ensure that after a probationer has been contacted, the information is communicated directly to the supervising probation officer
- Follow up with the supervising probation officer to determine what actions were taken as a result of the contact by the Gang Abatement Task Force
- Coordinate the schedule for probation officers working on the Gang Abatement Task Force Operations
- Assist in production of yearly gang report
- Regularly attend gang related training and share information with probation staff
- Attend monthly gang meetings in this county and surrounding jurisdictions and share information with probation staff
- Work with schools and community leaders to encourage development of pro-social activities for "at risk" youth
- Assist Probation Department Community Awareness Project in gang presentations

## CONCLUSION

The efforts of the San Mateo Countywide Gang Task Force have, and continue to, produce significant results. The Sheriff's Gang Intelligence Unit has become the backbone of the Countywide enforcement effort, while at the same time working cooperatively with other local, state and federal law enforcement agencies to proactively disrupt and dismantle criminal street gangs that continue to adversely affect the quality of life in our communities.

It should be remembered that "cooperation is the key to effective law enforcement" and San Mateo County's gang suppression program does just that.