

## City of San Diego Brings Departments Together to Offer Youth Safer Recreational Alternatives

Across the U.S., gang-related activity continues to challenge public safety officials. Between 2002 and 2008, the number of gangs in the U.S. rose 28 percent and active gang membership increased 6 percent.<sup>1</sup> Research shows that youth residing in gang-entrenched neighborhoods are especially vulnerable to gang recruitment (Howell, 2010)<sup>2</sup> with gang association starting in early adolescence (i.e., 12 to 13 years) and progressing to membership as the youth ages.<sup>3</sup> Recently, many jurisdictions in San Diego County have experienced an increase in gang activity, especially gun violence. Stakeholders from federal, state, and local levels have embraced the challenge of reducing the impact of gangs on public safety by implementing programs funded through California Gang Reduction, Intervention and Prevention (CalGRIP).<sup>4</sup> In the City of San Diego, CalGRIP features a unique partnership between law enforcement, gang prevention advocates, service providers, and the San Diego City Park and Recreation Department.

CalGRIP in San Diego set out to provide a continuum of activity – from prevention to suppression – in three neighborhoods with established gang histories. To reduce gang activity, the City included their Park and Recreation Department as the prevention partner, which agreed to extend Friday night hours (from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m.) at recreation centers to offer a safe alternative for youth to engage in pro-social activities. The centers were visited by 5,339 youth between 2008 and 2010; and based on sign-in sheets, the average age was 13 years old, indicating that this novel approach reached a vulnerable age group (not shown). Results from a survey of 173 youth asking where they would be if not at the centers indicate that this safe alternative is needed. Evidence of this is that roughly one-third each said they would be “hanging out” in the neighborhood (31%) or at a friend’s house (28%) if not at the center (Table 1). Also worth noting is that from 2008 to 2010, the San Diego Police Department (SDPD) saw a 37 percent drop in gang-related crime in the three neighborhoods (not shown). Although the data do not point to one specific reason for this decrease, this program may be one strategy related to the decline.

**Table 1**  
**CENTERS OFFER ALTERNATIVE TO “HANGING OUT” FOR MOST RESPONDENTS**

If not at the center, respondents would be at ...	
home	53%
hanging out in the neighborhood	31%
a friend’s house	28%
movies/mall/other public place	25%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>173</b>

NOTE: Percentages based on multiple responses.

SOURCE: Park and Recreation participant survey, 2010

These results suggest that, if made available, youth at risk of gang membership will utilize opportunities to engage in pro-social activities, and that CalGRIP reached the appropriate population and had a positive impact in the target neighborhoods. In May 2011, the SDPD received a new three-year grant to enhance existing CalGRIP activities. To read SANDAG’s full CalGRIP report, go to [www.sandag.org/cjc](http://www.sandag.org/cjc).

<sup>1</sup> Slowikowski, J. (2010). *Highlights of the 2008 National Youth Gang Survey*, OJJDP Fact Sheet. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice.

<sup>2</sup> Howell, J.C. (2010). *Gang Prevention: An Overview of Research and Programs*, OJJDP Juvenile Justice Bulletin. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice.

<sup>3</sup> Curry, D.G., Decker, S.H., Egle Jr., A. (2002). Gang involvement and delinquency in a middle school population. *JQ: Justice Quarterly*, 19(2), 275.

<sup>4</sup> Since 2007, the Cities of San Diego, as well as Chula Vista, Vista, and Oceanside, have successfully applied for dedicated funding through CalGRIP. For more info about this funding please visit <http://calgrip.ca.gov>