

## GANGS: THE IMPORTANCE OF COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGIES TO REDUCE VIOLENCE AND PROTECT COMMUNITIES

According to mid-year 2012 statistics, there are approximately 7,700 documented gang members in the San Diego region, as well as around 154 different gangs.<sup>1</sup> With the percent of homicides attributed to gangs up to 27 percent in the first half of 2012, compared to 18 percent for calendar year 2011,<sup>2</sup> it is more important than ever that community members have a clear understanding of how often youth join gangs, what the implications of gang membership are, and how stakeholders can most effectively work together to prevent gang involvement and intervene in the lives of those already involved.

While research has shown that youth gang involvement is often limited to one year or less, other studies indicate that gang involvement as a youth can have long-term implications for an individual into adulthood that include negative economic outcomes and continued contact with the justice system.<sup>3</sup> As part of the SANDAG Substance Abuse Monitoring (SAM) program, juvenile and adult arrestees who report any gang affiliation (ever for juveniles and within the past 5 years for adults) are asked to complete an addendum regarding their involvement. Local statistics from the most recent CJ Bulletin summarizing these data revealed that:<sup>4</sup>

- Twenty-four percent (24%) of adult male, 17 percent of adult female, 38 percent of juvenile male, and 28 percent of juvenile female arrestees report ever having affiliated with a gang;
- Nearly two-thirds (62%) report other family members were also in a gang;
- One-third (33%) of gang-involved arrestees admit to engaging in pimping or prostitution;
- More than half (52%) of gang-affiliated arrestees report having carried a gun and most (78%) report it was easy to obtain; and
- Over two in five (42%) of those who expressed a desire to leave the gang did not know of any resources to help them do so.

The San Diego Police Department recently announced its plan to implement a more intensive strategy to reduce gang-related violence that includes increased suppression activity, better communication, and more community involvement, which builds on other collaborative efforts within the City of San Diego, as well as the County overall.<sup>5</sup> As law enforcement continues to work to protect our community, efforts such as these which engage a variety of stakeholders, including schools, residents, and community-based organizations, is encouraged given results which show this strategy is more promising than groups working in silos. For a comprehensive list of resources regarding what works in fighting gangs, visit the National Gang Center at [www.nationalgangcenter.gov](http://www.nationalgangcenter.gov).

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<sup>1</sup> Statistics provided by the San Diego Police Department as documented in CalGang, a statewide database that documents gang members according to standardized guidelines. Information about CalGang is available at [www.oag.ca.gov/calgang](http://www.oag.ca.gov/calgang).

<sup>2</sup> Of the 48 homicides between January and June 2012 for which motive could be determined, 13 were attributed to gangs, including one in Chula Vista, three in Oceanside, and nine in San Diego. (Burke, C. (2012). *Crime in the San Diego Region Mid-Year 2012 Statistics*. San Diego, CA: SANDAG.)

<sup>3</sup> Krohn, M. D. et. al. (2011). The Cascading Effects of Adolescent Gang Involvement Across the Life Course. *Criminology*, 49, 4, 991-1,028.

<sup>4</sup> Correia, D., & Burke, C. (2011). *Gang Involvement Among San Diego County Arrestees in 2010*. San Diego, CA: SANDAG. Data with 2011 data will be released in the Fall 2012.

<sup>5</sup> Additional information about other local efforts to target and address gang violence, such as the San Diego Commission on Gang Prevention and Intervention, is available at [www.sandiego.gov](http://www.sandiego.gov) and the North County Gang Commission at [www.sdcounty.ca.gov](http://www.sdcounty.ca.gov).