Community Guide to Address Criminal Gangs in Idaho
November 16, 2012

Introduction

The United States is seeing a rise in gang membership across the country and as membership spreads so does the associated criminal activity. Today, there are over a million gang members operating in the United States. In some communities across America, these criminal gangs commit a high percentage of violent crime and drug trafficking. Idaho should not make the same mistake made in other areas of the Northwest and wait for this problem to reach a crisis state before we act. Because every Idaho community is vulnerable to gang crime and violence we must respond at a community level and create an environment that is unhealthy for gangs to prosper in order to truly make a difference.

Idaho continues to face many of the same gang issues being experienced in other states. As of July 2012, 19.2% of the Idaho prison population and 5.6% of the offenders being supervised by probation and parole are documented gang members.

To help communities understand the criminal gang environment, the following description from IdahoGangs.com website is provided:

> "In Idaho, gang members come from all races, cultures, and social classes. Contrary to popular belief, Idaho gang members are not all Hispanic youth from single parent households and low-income neighborhoods in the Nampa/Caldwell area or youth with shaved heads from the mountains of Northern Idaho. A large number of youth that are joining gangs are raised in two-parent households with middle and upper levels of socio-economic status. In addition, gang activity is scattered throughout the entire state of Idaho from Sandpoint to Boise and from Caldwell to Idaho Falls."

The desired outcome of this document is to provide a tool for citizens, schools, community leaders, and criminal justice agencies to combat criminal gang activities by providing reasonable outcome measurements.

Framework

The Idaho Criminal Justice Commission (ICJC) Gang Strategies Subcommittee uses the standardized framework found in the resource, "OJJDP Youth Gang Programs and Strategies Summary August 2000," to fit the nature of responses to gangs into three categories:

- Prevention
  "Prevention programs typically attempt to prevent youth from joining gangs, but might also seek to interrupt gang formation. A variety of strategies have been employed to prevent youth involvement in gangs, including community organization, improving conditions for youth, early childhood programs, school-based programs, and local clubs and after school programs."

- Intervention
  "Intervention programs seek to reduce the criminal activities by gangs by coaxing individuals away from gangs and reducing criminality among gang members. These programs provide alternative opportunities for youth and apply rehabilitation measures."

- Suppression
  "Intervention and suppression programs share the common goal of reducing criminal activities of gangs. Suppression programs use the full force of the law, generally through a combination of police, prosecution, and incarceration to deter the criminal activities of entire gangs, dissolve them, and remove individual gang members from them by means of prosecution and incarceration."

According to "Strategies to Address Gang Crimes: A Guidebook for Local Law Enforcement," in order to be more effective, the goal of prevention programs should focus on deterring youths from joining gangs. There are two types:

- <u>Primary prevention</u> includes efforts that focus on the whole community, particularly communities that have high rates of gang membership; and,

- <u>Secondary prevention</u> includes efforts that focus on youths who display the early signs of gang membership or other problem behaviors that indicate they are at high risk for involvement in gangs or gang crime.

Intervention efforts should focus on those who are on the fringes of gang membership, the early stages of membership, or at a stage of membership where they can be persuaded/encouraged to quit the gang.

Collaborative suppression efforts involve law enforcement, prosecutors and corrections working together to investigate, arrest, and prosecute known gang members. Without prevention and intervention efforts, suppression efforts cannot be as successful.

Goals and Measurements

The desired outcome of a focused gang strategy is to increase the safety of the citizens of Idaho by empowering and encouraging youth to reject involvement in criminal gangs as a viable option and by substantially reducing gang-related crime and violence in Idaho. The goals to accomplish this outcome are:

1. Stop the growth of criminal gangs in Idaho.

2. Reduce the number of gangs and gang members.

3. Render gangs ineffectual.

A variety of anti-gang strategies are available for community leaders to consider when developing a response to criminal gang activities. Local leaders have the flexibility and ability to identify specific community needs and expectations, develop and implement appropriate strategies and assess/measure the effectiveness of a community response to gang-related issues. Useful strategies and measures of success can be found in a variety of resources, including the United States Department of Justice Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (USDOJ-OCOPS), "Strategies to Address Gang Crime: A Guidebook for Local Law Enforcement, and the National Center for Justice Planning."

Developmental Assets

Research has shown that a comprehensive gang strategy will benefit communities by including building blocks of healthy development, known as, Developmental Assets, that help young people grow up healthy, caring and responsible. A complete list of assets is available at the website www.search-institute.org/developmental-assets-tools.
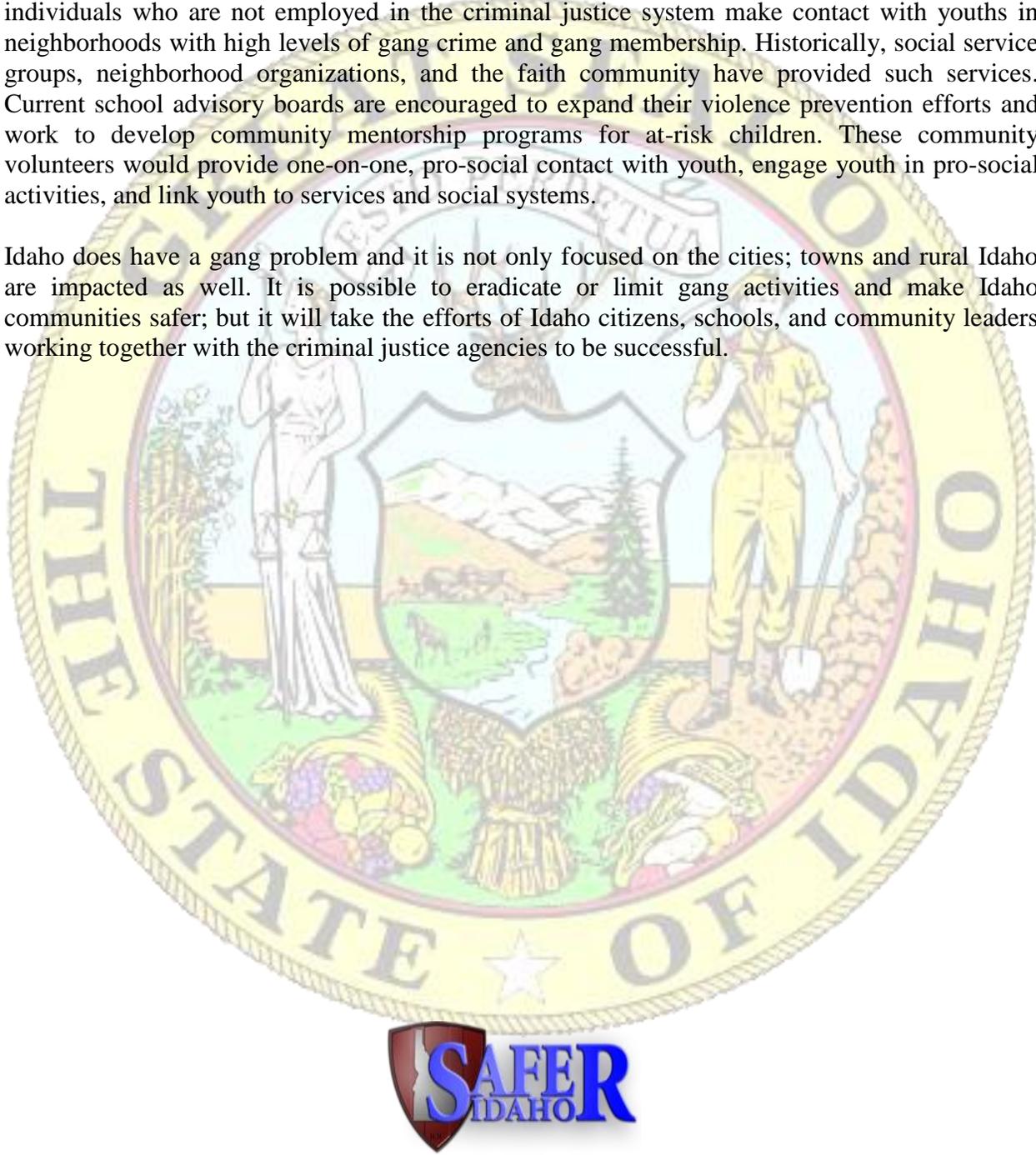
Conclusion

A big challenge to any comprehensive community-wide response is coordination. This is an opportunity for law enforcement, the community and social services to work together effectively and for law enforcement units to cooperate fully with each other. This coordinated effort is essential to the success of any prevention, intervention and suppression responses.

At times, Idaho communities may need help to understand gang problems and develop strategies and responses. As a resource, members of the Idaho Criminal Justice Commission Gang Strategies Subcommittee are available to provide gang related education, training and technical assistance to interested parties in Idaho communities. Requests for assistance can be made by contacting the Chair of the Idaho Criminal Justice Commission at Idaho Department of Correction, (208) 658-2115.

Local communities are encouraged to explore and implement evidenced-based and community-based prevention, intervention, and suppression programs. Attached is an appendix of resources; this list is **not** all inclusive.

Local Idaho communities are encouraged to develop a comprehensive outreach program. The program should focus on reducing cohesion among gangs and individual gang members, community-based mentoring, and after-school recreation. In a street outreach program, individuals who are not employed in the criminal justice system make contact with youths in neighborhoods with high levels of gang crime and gang membership. Historically, social service groups, neighborhood organizations, and the faith community have provided such services. Current school advisory boards are encouraged to expand their violence prevention efforts and work to develop community mentorship programs for at-risk children. These community volunteers would provide one-on-one, pro-social contact with youth, engage youth in pro-social activities, and link youth to services and social systems.

Idaho does have a gang problem and it is not only focused on the cities; towns and rural Idaho are impacted as well. It is possible to eradicate or limit gang activities and make Idaho communities safer; but it will take the efforts of Idaho citizens, schools, and community leaders working together with the criminal justice agencies to be successful.

Resources

National Center for Justice Planning (NCJP)
http://www.ncjp.org/
"The NCJP is a unique resource for planners at all levels of government and in all agencies and organizations responsible for developing strategies for delivering justice. Building on the knowledge and expertise of practitioners who are working to build communities through effective justice, the NCJP serves as the catalyst for transforming the practice of justice planning."

OJJDP Best Practices to Address Community Gang Problems
https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/222799.pdf
"This report provides guidance for communities that are considering how best to address a youth gang problem that already exists or threatens to become a reality. The guidance is based on the implementation of the Comprehensive Gang Model developed through the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), and most recently tested in OJJDP's Gang Reduction Program."

OJJDP Youth Gang Programs and Strategy Summary August 2000
https://www.ncjrs.gov/html/ojjdp/summary_2000_8/home.html
"This Summary includes multiple techniques that some jurisdictions use to achieve prevention, intervention, and suppression program goals—such as providing alternatives to gang involvement while employing suppression to make gang life unattractive. Other jurisdictions incorporate multi-agency suppression initiatives involving several law enforcement agencies, perhaps in multiple jurisdictions. Many jurisdictions are taking a comprehensive approach by integrating prevention, intervention, and suppression strategies. Finally, some jurisdictions attempt to suppress gangs by passing legislation or city ordinances prohibiting gang involvement or directed toward specific crimes."

DOJ-OCCPS Strategies to Address Gang Crime: A Guidebook for Local Law Enforcement
http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/RIC/ResourceDetail.aspx?RID=459
"To assist law enforcement and parents in identifying and addressing gang crime, the COPS Office has developed a variety of tools and resources including "Strategies to Address Gang Crime: A Guidebook for Local Law Enforcement." Author Scott H. Decker, PhD, provides information about developing and enhancing local law enforcement responses to gangs in their jurisdictions. The focus of the guidebook is on the use of problem-solving strategies to help agencies select the interventions most appropriate for their jurisdictions. In particular, the guidebook describes the SARA model (Scanning, Analysis, Response and Assessment), a strategic problem-solving process with which local law enforcement is familiar and can apply to its local gang problem. This is the must-have resource to help law enforcement understanding the factors that contribute to their gang problem and select appropriate responses."

Search Institute
http://www.search-institute.org/developmental-assets-are-free
"Search Institute® is a leading global innovator in discovering what children and adolescents need to succeed in their families, schools, and communities. Drawing on extensive research, Search Institute brings hopeful solutions to pressing challenges in the lives of young people and their communities. Our vision is for a world where all young people are valued and thrive. We work toward this vision through applied research and evaluation as well as by providing tools, resources, and services to support positive change in communities and society."

Idaho Gang Website
http://idahogangs.com/
This website provides a description and overview of gangs located in Idaho. Additionally, users can make anonymous tips about gang activity.

Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.)
http://www.great-online.org/
This website describes the organization, provides training information, instructor resources, news, components, and helpful links.

Weed and Seed Program
https://www.cfda.gov/?s=program&mode=form&tab=step1&id=43cb0562aabe94ac552214a3b5
This website provides general information about Weed and Seed federal grants.