

CALIFORNIA CITIES GANG PREVENTION NETWORK PROMISING DEVELOPMENTS FOR SUSTAINABILITY OF LOCAL EFFORTS

By Andrew Moore

INTRODUCTION

Since 2007, teams of mayors, police chiefs and a broad range of local partners from 13 cities have made comprehensive, collaborative efforts to reduce gang violence, with support from their peers and colleagues in the California Cities Gang Prevention Network. Member cities include Fresno, Los Angeles, Oakland, Oxnard, Richmond, Sacramento, Salinas, San Bernardino, San Diego, San Francisco, San José, Santa Rosa, and Stockton. The National League of Cities Institute for Youth, Education and Families and the National Council on Crime and Delinquency have co-sponsored the network with support from the California Endowment, California Wellness Foundation and other local philanthropies.

As the California Cities Gang Prevention Network marks its first five years of peer learning and sharing, promising practices have emerged in several cities that point the way toward increased sustainability for local efforts. Embedding a comprehensive approach to gang violence reduction balanced among prevention, intervention, and enforcement in the practices of city governments and their partners has constituted a network priority from the start. Also of high importance for sustainability is to change the way city governments and their nonprofit and county partners “do business” when it comes to reducing gang impact, typically working in far more coordinated and collaborative ways.

This policy and practice brief offers a snapshot of the emerging and promising developments, and changed ways of doing business, in several cities. These developments, growing organically from cities’ comprehensive plans, offer various routes to sustaining local youth and gang violence prevention efforts. Los Angeles is migrating toward a family focus, allowing the city to direct and evaluate its comprehensive services in a consistent manner. San José has stepped up its involvement in reentry and strengthened its collaboration with the

county to prepare for the impending realignment of criminal justice responsibilities among state and county governments in California. Salinas is changing policing practices in one high-violence neighborhood to build trust between law enforcement and the community. Santa Rosa is regionalizing its effort, knowing that gangs do not respect city boundaries. Sacramento has layered in a primary prevention emphasis through a focus on early literacy. Looked at across a continuum, these activities exemplify the dynamism within the network even as they suggest a trend toward greater permanence.

SALINAS ALTERS POLICING STRATEGIES IN A HIGH-VIOLENCE NEIGHBORHOOD

“We’re going to fight this fight whether we’re fully funded or half funded or not funded at all.”

— Deputy Chief of Police Kelly McMillin, Salinas Police Department,
“In Salinas, Fighting Gang Violence on a Shoestring,”
New York Times, January 30, 2012.

Salinas, a city of 150,000, faced a record-setting number of homicides in 2009, virtually all gang-related – twice the rate in the city as in Monterey County as a whole, and triple that of the rest of the state. With leadership from the mayor and police chief, as well as substantial assistance from the California Cities Gang Prevention Network and the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School, the Community Alliance for Safety and Peace (CASP) of Salinas/Monterey County incubated and implemented the Salinas Comprehensive Strategy for Community-Wide Violence Reduction. Under the vision of creating a “Peaceful Community,” the plan sought to address six significant problem areas identified through community listening sessions, research, and the California Endowment’s Building Healthy Communities initiative. These areas included: social and economic conditions, engaging and supervising youth, environmental design and urban planning, law enforcement, education and schools, and the impact of drugs and alcohol.

Of note, the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS), under the leadership of retired Colonel Hy Rothstein and colleagues, contributed facilitation and data analysis skills to the formulation of the plan. NPS' initial "counterinsurgency" framing triggered controversy, especially in the Hispanic community where many residents viewed police with mistrust and some perceived them as an occupying or predatory force. The controversy abated when city leaders stressed that the focus of the "counterinsurgency" strategy was not to overcome the violence problem with force, but to strengthen neighborhoods, communities and families and thereby build and sustain an environment where violent gangs could not thrive.

Whereas the plan has a citywide scope, CASP, the city's newly formed community safety division, and the police department determined to focus early efforts on the Hebbbron neighborhood, known for its high crime rates. The assignment of two police officers exclusively to Hebbbron to do whatever it takes to bring back the community – from neighborhood beautification to getting to know the families and, in essence, rebuilding after decades of mistrust – signals a readiness on the part of the police to conduct their business in a different way. This policy and practice change in turn suggests new directions that police and their partners in other hard-hit neighborhoods could take in California and across the nation.

Indeed, changes in the law enforcement sector may represent seismic shifts in how Salinas responds to its youth violence and gang issues. Over the past five years, budget cuts have meant the loss of 40 officer positions, a 21 percent reduction in force. Nevertheless, Deputy Chief of Police Kelly McMillin has played a central role in representing the police department in the overall planning effort, and in altering police department policy and practice to respond better to the needs of a frightened community. Deputy Chief McMillin's redeployment of two officers to Hebbbron transcends budget strictures: "We're going to fight this fight whether we're fully funded or half funded or not funded at all," said McMillin in a January 2012 interview with the New York Times.

The core rationale for McMillin's redeployment strategy is not primarily enforcement, but trust building. While trust can lead to better and more frequent crime reporting, that is not the focus either. Neighborhood leaders and service agencies meet in Hebbbron's family center where the police department has opened an office staffed by Officers Rich Lopez and Jeffrey Lofton. According to the Monterey Herald, Lopez and Lofton walk the streets and "hope to become familiar, trusted

faces as they knock on every door in the area defined as Census Tract 5.01." Says McMillin, the officers "spend their days doing whatever is needed, like mediating disputes between sixth grade girls and helping people in the neighborhood write petitions to have street lights repaired." Community Safety Director Georgina Mendoza reports that the community sees them as "my cop, my officer." Over the long term, McMillin observes, "What do we want to leave behind in Hebbbron? Not a structure, but a capacity, a sense of trust in the city, that the city is there for them."

Reinforcing the new orientation, the Salinas Police Managers' Association, composed of sergeants, commanders and deputy chiefs, nominated Officer Lopez as "Officer of the Year." The honor typically goes to a top performing officer with an impressive résumé that includes high-profile arrests, multiple firearm recoveries and completion of complex investigations. Lopez' nomination stemmed from outstanding efforts on patrol and, notes McMillin, "the work he's been doing in Hebbbron as a 'CASP Cop'...Staff recognized the importance of the outreach he's been doing, the trust building, the time and effort he's put into understanding the neighborhood and community members he's been assigned to serve."

Other agencies have stepped forward to complement the police redeployment. CASP, with the county's behavioral health division in the lead, organizes "charlas" (chats) two Friday evenings each month in Hebbbron. In an interview with Lynn Graebner of the California Health Report, Mendoza commented on another example of increasing trust between residents and officials. "At first, CASP members brought the food and provided the space," said Mendoza. "Now the residents are saying, 'Don't bring your food. We have better food, and we'll decide where to meet.'" The faith community has weighed in as well. Pastor Frank Gomez has opened his church to about 50 second through seventh graders for tutoring four days per week. "We give up our facility four days a week, but it's a no brainer for me," Gomez said in a newspaper interview.

What are the results of Salinas' comprehensive plan to date? Citywide crime numbers have been going the right way: There were 51 shootings and 11 gang-related homicides in 2011, down from 151 shootings and 29 gang-related homicides in 2009. At the neighborhood level, public health nurses, police, probation officers, and recreation staff rub shoulders with each other and residents in Hebbbron, and local partners note substantial improvements in building trust and community. "I see changes," says Brian Contreras, director of Second

Chance Family and Youth Services in Salinas. “Kids are coming back to this area. There are new faces.”

SACRAMENTO’S “NEW PARADIGM” PLAN LEADS WITH PREVENTION

“Prevention – it’s what we should be doing for all kids.”
– City Councilmember Jay Schenirer

After passing through an era of mayoral transition and severe fiscal straits, Sacramento was among the most recent of the 13 network cities to coalesce around a comprehensive plan. With strong leadership from Mayor Kevin Johnson and by embracing a diverse group of partners, the city emerged with a “new paradigm” plan that focuses on prevention through early literacy as one strategy for reducing high rates of violence and incarceration. Whereas all network cities’ comprehensive plans include a prevention plank – and many cities have sought in recent years to increase coordination of prevention activities with community-based organizations and county agencies – Sacramento stands at the vanguard with its heavy concentration on prevention. The city has advocated for this strategy and now, through implementation, has the opportunity to serve as a beacon for other communities.

The “Mayor’s Strategic Plan for Gang Prevention 2012-2015” is the product of a Mayor’s Gang Prevention Task Force appointed following high-profile, gang-related shootings in Sacramento. Building blocks for the plan emerged from a positive youth development framework, focusing on “protective factors” that youth can accumulate to guard against gang involvement rather than a primary examination of “risk factors.” Attending school regularly, reading on grade level by the end of third grade, and building strong connections with caring adults through afterschool programs all constitute examples of the protective factors that Sacramento seeks to strengthen. Further informing this focus is a concern for establishing stronger connections within the community “to get in front of the gang issue by addressing the root causes that lead to the individual, school, peer, and family disconnectedness.” City Councilmember Jay Schenirer comments, “Prevention – it’s what we should be doing for all kids. A large group do not get [prevention services] now.”

Based on principles such as meaningful community engagement, enhanced cross-system efficacy, accountability, and a public health approach to gang prevention, the Sacramento

plan sets out goals and strategies in four areas: 1) Increase school-based supports and enrichment activities; 2) Strengthen community capacity to address gang involvement and create safe neighborhoods; 3) Provide workforce readiness and other positive alternatives for at-risk youth; and 4) Develop regional collaboration in areas of enforcement, awareness, evaluation and implementation of the Mayor’s Gang Prevention Task Force goals and objectives. The plan establishes specific targets to reduce gang violence by 30 percent in three years, improve the Academic Performance Index and school attendance rates, and reduce recidivism among gang-involved youth.

The Sacramento Police Department is one of the agencies adopting a new approach. The department assigned Lieutenant Kathy Lester to supervise school resource officers (SROs) as a unified force, and also made her time available to assist with preparation of the city’s recently submitted CalGRIP (California Gang Reduction, Intervention and Prevention Initiative) proposal. Lester explains how the department and other team members proceeded: “The chief’s question was, what can we do with existing resources? We didn’t want to duplicate, so we did an inventory of what we already had.... We saw what was missing, observed a significant waiting list for afterschool programs, and so, focused our newest effort on children in kindergarten through sixth grade. We identified Project Learn [early literacy curriculum and tools] as an evidence-based practice, and we didn’t have enough funding [from the city] for it, so we brought in partners.” As Lester explains, “We don’t get anything done these days unless we have collaboration, coordination, and partnership. No one single agency can act in a bubble. Everything is moving toward regionalization. We also work with traffic engineering and county animal control. The SRO program is specific to the city, but we meet with other SROs in the area as well.”

Change has also come to the mayor’s office, with Mayor Johnson as chief fundraiser and assembler of resources. Nik Howard spearheads the Sacramento READS! Third Grade Literacy Campaign as a centerpiece of the new plan, operating as a member of the mayor’s staff from a privately-funded base at the Stand Up nonprofit organization. Support to date has come from national and regional sources such as the W.K. Kellogg, Tides, and Sierra Health Foundations and the multinational education company, Knowledge Universe. Howard describes part of the plan’s impetus: “We wanted to make sure to engage kids from birth to age eight in early reading interventions, and middle and high school kids at risk of gang

involvement as tutors and volunteers...By focusing energy on early intervention, we are not only going to solve the literacy gap, we will also get at ancillary issues.”

As another feature of plan implementation in Sacramento, Councilmember Schenirer has launched the multipurpose Way Up initiative out of his district office to establish “a proof point for what works – everything we do [in the Oak Park neighborhood] is scalable citywide.” As a parallel to early literacy efforts, for instance, Way Up arranges medical screening to ensure connection to a “medical home” for 6,500 students in nine schools. “We will track emergency room visits, and hope to see a drop in usage,” said Councilmember Schenirer. Way Up also operates a leadership development program and arranges “Summer in City Hall” stipended internships. Notably, the Oak Park pilot neighborhood constitutes half of the South Sacramento focus area of The California Endowment’s Building Healthy Communities project, and close coordination is in place among these geographically-focused efforts.

Maureen Price of the Sacramento Boys and Girls Clubs describes additional features of the plan in action. “We have adopted a more comprehensive literacy program for children in first through third grades,” says Price. “We got a new grant to identify kids who are not proficient in reading...We are conducting pilot projects in two school sites, and may implement Project Learn in club houses next fall. Also, the United Way supports the Star Readers program [in the clubs].”

As Sacramento proceeds with plan implementation, a variety of voices remind city leaders of key issues to consider. Vidal Gonzalez of La Familia, a youth development and employment organization, commented, “A general approach is not going to work. [You have to take into account] cultural and ethnic differences, particularly with Latino gangs...The family has a lot to do with it. Some gang participation crosses generations.” One of La Familia’s contributions to the early literacy efforts in the plan is the development of a community lending library with donated books by multicultural authors for young readers. The organization also identifies older youth who will read to younger children.

Greg King of the grassroots neighborhood group Always Knocking, who will chair the community engagement effort under the plan, says, “On paper you can see it. Actions remain to be seen. City officials are on the right path.” King looks forward to leveraging the plan to accomplish several infrastructure priorities, including “keeping the doors open at

youth centers even in the face of budget cuts, establishing a screening policy for volunteers while still making them feel welcome, and giving people in the community a chance to feel heard.” King adds, “While educating the kids, we have to bring in the parents. I say PIESE – Parent Involvement Equals Success for Education.” Initially, King is coordinating an effort to support parents to spend at least 30 minutes per month in their child’s school.

Alicia Ross, a leader with the Sacramento ACT faith-based community organizing group, worked closely with the police department to bring the Boston Ceasefire intervention program to the city. She sees the plan as “a good baseline tool to keep pushing collectively on prevention and intervention, [especially if we muster] real resources behind it and set benchmarks for how the city will implement the plan.” Meanwhile, the combination of federal, state, and foundation grants that have supported Ceasefire to date will run out later in 2012. Thus, fundraising will proceed for continued intervention activities as well as the proposed, scaled-up prevention planks.

Councilmember Schenirer captures the sense of determination and commitment that undergirds the city’s efforts. “We’re going to figure out how to do this as we go,” says Schenirer. “For instance, we’re placing interns in the city’s neighborhood services division. And we’re working with parks and recreation on summer food programs...this may lead to a new structure in city government.” He notes, “We want to be ready with infrastructure and results before we seek a dedicated [public] funding source.” Specifically, Councilmember Schenirer will pay attention to “the standard indicators of youth and gun violence. On the school side, [we’ll look at] attendance and graduation rates from the third grade on, reading scores from third grade forward, middle and high school suspensions and expulsions, and [ultimately] persistence rates in community colleges and California state universities.”

Looking ahead, Police Lieutenant Lester says the plan shows that “we have actual commitment on a theoretical level from the mayor, councilmembers, agency heads, and schools. Now we can bring in Kaiser Permanente (the region’s largest health provider) and community-based organizations for support and conduct a constant evaluation of what we’re doing. We’ll continue looking for best practices. And, if we’re not succeeding, we’ll change the plans.” For other cities developing new strategies, Lester recommends: “Assess the problem and do a resource inventory...Typically, you’ll find a lot of agencies working independently. These can be much more effective if

you pull them together...Get the community involved, do outreach, take a community-oriented policing approach... From there, report findings and implement programs with evidence behind them.”

SAN JOSÉ COORDINATES WITH THE COUNTY ON REALIGNMENT AND REENTRY

“At the outset of the task force, we had prevention, intervention, enforcement, and aftercare [as watchwords].” – Cora Tomalinas, community activist, registered nurse and winner of the California Peace Prize presented by The California Endowment

The City of San José – long known for its highly collaborative approach to gang violence reduction – faced a new reality in 2011, brought on by impending changes in prison sentencing and probation policy. “Realignment” is the all-purpose term Californians use to describe a suite of new policies and budget shifts designed to reduce prison populations, shift responsibility for supervision of individuals on probation and parole to the county level, and lower costs. Implications across Santa Clara County, where 60 percent of county residents reside within the city of San José, included a sudden uptick in the number of adult probationers returning to the community, challenges to the adequacy of reentry service and support systems, an increased need for jail beds and related services, and potentially closer connections between prison and street gangs. San José expects to receive some 70 percent of former prisoners released to the county. The county holds responsibility for juvenile and adult probation, prosecution, courts, and corrections. City and county leaders realized when realignment was announced that neither had a formal reentry plan in place.

To confront this wave of reform, the city once again applied its key “multi-purpose tool,” the Mayor’s Gang Prevention Task Force (MGPTF), which has been in place since 1991 with an expansive membership of city, county, and community and faith-based organization leaders. The response of the task force and its early experience implementing reentry plans constitute an emerging, promising practice for policymakers across the state and the nation to consider as states grapple with the balance between prisons and community supervision in an era of fiscal austerity. Specifically, the task force reoriented and reorganized itself to confront new challenges, added a reentry plank to its guiding three-year plan, and

joined forces with the county to avoid duplicating oversight structures for reentry. Viewed as a whole, the city’s response serves as yet another local model of evolving collaboration for the community’s benefit.

Longtime task force staff lead Angel Rios, deputy director of the city’s Department of Parks, Recreation, and Neighborhood Services, provides a helpful view on how realignment events unfolded within the task force structure:

The city doesn’t have to play this prominent a role, based on regulations or statute...The task force put briefings and reports on the [bimonthly] agenda as to what the probation department and police department expected would happen. Briefings evolved into an updated strategic goal area focused on reentry/realignment. Unlike all other goals which are city-driven, this one is county-led with support from the city...The topic came up in open forum comments from the community, as in, “Is it true all these releases are coming? They’re going to release all these criminals into our neighborhoods, and that’s dangerous.” There was a lot of incomplete [information] or misinformation. We made sure [other] people spoke at the meeting who were going to be involved so as to understand the issues better. This helped to demystify the issue, even though we didn’t have all the answers [in advance]. Overall, this resulted in the city and county taking a more comprehensive approach, with more partners, and also mitigated the community outcry.

Cora Tomalinas, a leader among faith-based community organizers in San José and a longtime task force member, comments, “At the outset of the task force, we had prevention, intervention, enforcement, and aftercare [as watchwords]... Up until recently, we have given minimal attention to aftercare.” Tomalinas welcomes realignment for three reasons: “the problem of minority overrepresentation, the needs for health and mental health care, and the need to help families and the community [readjust].”

County Supervisor George Shirakawa, a task force member and former city councilmember, provides an analytical description of conditions when the county first learned that realignment was coming: “We were already looking at reentry, yet we had never pointed an instrument at ourselves to look at the effectiveness of what we were doing. We were still in silos, had no formal reentry plan that brought everybody together. When realignment came along, we needed to scale up.” Assistant District Attorney Marc Buller added, “We saw high recidivism rates of 70-80 percent.”

The task force's interagency collaboration subcommittee emerged as a helpful structure for joint planning. Rios explains, "We saw the county mirroring the efforts of the MGPTF, calling the same stakeholders together for its reentry network. The mayor invited Supervisor Shirakawa to sit on the policy team, and asked him to co-chair the subcommittee [with me]... We made reentry and realignment a standing agenda item. Through that subcommittee, we agree to link reentry efforts under the MGPTF umbrella. This reduced some of the redundancy, and kept the county in the lead."

Through the subcommittee, notes Shirakawa, "I ensure that collaboration between our [county] departments and the city happens...[and on the policy team] I'm there with the mayor at the dais...As assets dwindle, we're trying to be efficient. It's the same families that we deal with in our systems, which the city identifies [through its outreach]." Tomalinas, also a member of the subcommittee, comments that "the experience of residents helped shape the reentry plan and how we treat our young people who are coming back." She adds that the experience of ever-closer city-county collaboration on realignment may lead the task force to take on a new regional identity and set of functions, beyond its longstanding city focus.

From another countywide perspective, Chief Probation Officer Sheila Mitchell – stipulated by statute to chair the county corrections partnership to develop realignment plans – recalls involving the San José police chief and a mayoral aide in the deliberations of the partnership and working with them to prepare and make a presentation to the San José City Council. The partnership group continues to meet regularly, with a city team member also involved in implementation. Notably, city services and influence touch two of Mitchell's top priorities for assistance to reentering former prisoners – housing and employment.

Operationally, Buller notes:

The MGPTF brings partnerships, additional resources, collaboration – everyone is at the table...MGPTF will be a partner in how we go about providing services to those on probation.... If people coming out of prison have jobs and services, they will be less likely to commit crimes and become involved with gangs. MGPTF has to look at broad prevention programs. It doesn't necessarily affect just gang members....MGPTF has been flexible enough to move in different directions. It still has enough momentum to keep going even in bad economic times. With realignment, what

we're seeing is just another morphing, [a collective opportunity to say] "let's put some ideas together and figure out how we're going to do this."

Jermaine Hardy of the county juvenile probation department confirms that the task force also plays this role for juvenile reentry:

We're changing the way we're reintegrating youth to create a seamless transition back into the community. We have been failing on recidivism rates, [and are now building a structure through which] intensive supervision, services and support will enable youth to be more successful. We're trying to establish ties and connections and work much better with families and community supports... MGPTF [and its service provider partners constitute a] network that has resources and supports, so that when we identify a gap in services, we know where to turn. We expect to find challenges and unmet needs. Having MGPTF there, with its connections and a diversity of community-based partners, we'll be able to fill those gaps. Also, MGPTF provides oversight and adds a degree of accountability, ensuring collaboration, coordination, and sharing of information.

With the realignment process underway for only a few months, some voices acknowledge the relative strength of the structure while advising a "wait and see" approach to the details of implementation. Michael Pritchard of the Pathway behavioral health organization notes that the selection of inmates for release to community supervision does not take into account mental health and drug and alcohol dual diagnoses and the concomitant need for ongoing medication. Adds Pritchard, "We need to allow this [realignment] to work; we can't scrap it after the first bump" and can't withdraw funding after only one year. Sarah Gonzalez, a community advocate with the Parole Action Community Team, points to a need to transfer capacity once focused on parolees to the expanded probationer population. Assistant Police Chief Rikki Goede notes that, with a possible uptick in property crimes, "our biggest concern is [that realignment comes with] no additional funding for police officers....It will be important to 'follow the money'...If it's working, the people who are released won't be arrested again and will participate in programs."

Those most closely involved with collaborative realignment efforts in San José offer a few recommendations for leaders in other cities and counties. Supervisor Shirakawa says, "I would encourage other counties to visit San José and tailor what

works for them...Any time you can create any kind of inter-agency venue and ensure you have reporting across agencies, it is better.” Lead staffer Rios adds three points:

First, talk about the good, bad, and ugly of realignment. Make the subject atopic that you discuss in an inter-organizational setting. Second, talk about it in a way that moves the discussion toward action that is driven or assigned to specific organizations. Here’s the role of probation, the police department, the nonprofit community, churches....Develop a plan that incorporates all those roles. Then, develop a community goal or philosophical statement about what you want to accomplish. Is it mainly suppression, or rehabilitation, or a combination? Third, make sure the right message gets out there. Take this joint community strategy and message to the rest of the community that hasn’t attended the meetings...It is important to engage residents in assisting with reintegration.

Buller counsels, “[Working together on realignment] may be more difficult when long-term relationships [between city and county] are not in place. We [at the county level] see the benefit of the task force and its programs in the long range, in terms of community protection. And it’s helpful to be able to work with the largest city in the county.”

SANTA ROSA MOVES TOWARD A REGIONAL STRATEGY

“The relationships are extraordinary. We share a mission. There is an easy sharing of information.” — Robert Ochs, Sonoma County Chief Probation Officer

Based on solid anchoring and demonstrable results in Santa Rosa, as well as the desire of neighboring communities to learn from and coordinate with Sonoma County’s largest city, what were once local efforts have evolved toward a regional strategy. This progression of events has assumed greater importance because of the state’s recent turn toward realignment. Realignment discussions have brought city officials in contact with the wider law enforcement and human service provider communities. As such, regionalization represents a natural outgrowth of Santa Rosa’s work, and serves as a potential model for other cities across the state.

With a Mayor’s Gang Prevention Task Force (MGPTF) in place for nearly 10 years, a quarter-cent sales tax that provides dedicated funds for police, fire, and gang prevention and intervention activities, and a five-year strategic work

plan effective since 2008, Santa Rosa has emerged as a leader among medium-sized cities pursuing a comprehensive gang reduction strategy. The city’s plan ably blends prevention, intervention and enforcement strategies, and sets out criminal justice goals – such as cutting gang violence in half in five years – alongside quality of life goals, such as increasing school attendance rates.

Several factors contributed toward the regionalization push in Santa Rosa. City and county leaders recognized that youth violence and gang activity does not stop neatly at a city’s borders. Santa Rosa’s gangs become Petaluma’s problem, as Petaluma’s become Santa Rosa’s. Witnessing success, other jurisdictions such as Sonoma, Windsor, and Rohnert Park have requested help from the Santa Rosa team. In addition, the composition of the MGPTF policy team, which includes the sheriff, the district attorney and the chief probation officer, as well as joint participation in the county Law Enforcement Chief’s Association, meant that key county officials knew intimately of and backed Santa Rosa’s work. The county also recognized the need to plan for the future before its jail became severely overcrowded and before it faced an unaffordable bill for new construction.

Another factor that fostered regional collaboration was the State of California’s commitment to shift responsibility from the state to the county for the custody, treatment and supervision of individuals convicted of specific non-violent, non-serious, non-sex offenses. Furthermore, the joint city-county membership of the county’s Asset Forfeiture Allocation Committee – including the chief probation officer, Santa Rosa police chief, and district attorney, who are also members of the MGPTF – provides an ideal perch from which to envision and help fund regional initiatives. Last but hardly least among elected officials, the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors and Santa Rosa City Council pledged full, coordinated support for countywide youth violence prevention efforts.

Examining how joint actions flowed from these factors helps paint a multi-dimensional picture of regionalization as it develops. For example, Santa Rosa’s Police Chief Tom Schwedhelm’s participation in the Sonoma County Law Enforcement Chief’s Association (SCLECA) provided a venue for spreading news of Santa Rosa’s successes among other police and sheriffs’ departments in the county. “The relationships are extraordinary. We share a mission. There is an easy sharing of information,” says Robert Ochs, Sonoma County Chief Probation Officer. In addition, the county had committed itself to an “Upstream” initiative chaired by the former

director of human services, in parallel to the SCLECA, which would help ensure that prevention and intervention initiatives receive equal attention. “We’re going to enforce the law, but we’ve made a commitment to keep people out of the criminal justice system. Our county has a rich tradition of collaboration and making changes for the better,” adds Ochs.

The availability of asset forfeiture funds has enabled the city and county to buttress state realignment funds. Early priorities have included opening a day reporting center (DRC) to help handle the influx of returning former prisoners, accomplished in January 2012. The county continues to seek funding for a proposed community corrections center to complement the DRC. The Sonoma County Probation Department receives funding from the state Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act (JJCPA) for three school probation officers and two gang probation officers active in portions of the county beyond Santa Rosa city limits. Additionally, a juvenile probation officer is funded by the state’s Youthful Offenders Block Grant specifically to handle mental health cases.

Ochs believes that the sound links among the city, county supervisors and county administrators have enabled the county to attract grants from a number of sources. City and county leaders had put together what they believed to be a winning application for federal funds from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency to develop a countywide effort. Some of its key provisions included implementing or enhancing evidence-based gang prevention, intervention, and suppression programs and hiring a multi-strategy gang coordinator to expand the regionalization efforts by coordinating existing community-based anti-gang programs and strategies that are closely aligned with local law enforcement efforts. Although cutbacks in federal funding forced the withdrawal of the request for proposals, city and county officials have pledged to implement the plan to the extent possible with available resources.

In fulfillment of one aspect of the city’s strategic plan and one of seven Santa Rosa City Council goals, the MGPTF hosted a regionalization forum in June 2010 to broaden and strengthen community gang prevention and intervention efforts. Invitees included all city councilmembers and police chiefs from around Sonoma County, law enforcement leaders from probation and the district attorney’s office, members of the county board of supervisors, and representatives from the faith-based and nonprofit communities. More than

80 community leaders from across the county participated. The agenda for this “regional gang summit” included a panel of local representatives from law enforcement, education, city council and a community-based organization that provides services to former gang members. This panel shared how the efforts of the city MGPTF have changed how they function. In addition, representatives from the City of San Pablo shared their current efforts to adopt a similar gang prevention and intervention model. The forum produced commitments to work together even more closely across the county.

LOS ANGELES ADOPTS A FAMILY FRAMEWORK

Los Angeles Office of Gang Reduction and Youth Development (GRYD) activities “are focused on building community-level support systems to alter norms that tolerate violence and support healthy children, youth, and families.” — Deputy Mayor Guillermo Cespedes and GRYD Research Director Denise Herz

The City of Los Angeles Office of Gang Reduction and Youth Development (GRYD) directs and oversees the implementation of the Gang Reduction and Youth Development comprehensive strategy, an evolving “road map” that combines prevention, intervention, suppression, and community engagement activities to reduce risk factors associated with gang membership and violence. Following recommendations from The Advancement Project – a nonprofit, “public policy change organization” – and the city controller, Los Angeles created GRYD as an office that would oversee the implementation of all of its gang violence reduction strategies and ensure that these strategies were effective and efficient.

Increasingly, GRYD places gang-affected families and communities at the center of its comprehensive activities. As Deputy Mayor Guillermo Cespedes and GRYD Research Director Denise Herz noted in a December 2011 summary of the city’s comprehensive strategy, GRYD activities “are focused on building community-level support systems to alter norms that tolerate violence and support healthy children, youth, and families.” GRYD’s conceptual framework emphasizes that families and communities can develop and apply their strengths to reduce at-risk behavior and grow from adversity. Following this framework allows GRYD to evaluate its gang reduction efforts and identify the interventions most likely to build community resiliency, reduce risk factors for joining gangs, and stop gang violence.

When Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa established GRYD in 2008, he tasked the new office with implementing Los Angeles' gang violence reduction efforts and evaluating those efforts' impact. GRYD's evaluation revealed that the city's comprehensive strategy lacked a unified framework to guide implementation. Cespedes recalls that, "in the beginning, the comprehensive plan appeared disjointed." Furthermore, since existing literature on comprehensive strategies did not provide much specific direction on service delivery, it was not clear "what types of services should be delivered, how services should be delivered, and how services across strategic approaches should be coordinated."

GRYD subsequently consulted with service providers working with Los Angeles' gang-impacted communities and all parties agreed upon the necessity of working with families to help high-risk and gang-involved youth. In response to this driving principle, a team of researchers fashioned GRYD's unified conceptual framework based on family systems theory, which views social context (such as family and community) as the starting point for making change. GRYD's prevention and intervention activities are designed to focus and build on the strengths of the individual, community, and family. By building their strengths, the expectation is that the risk factors associated with gang violence and involvement will decline.

With this new, clear, conceptual framework, GRYD found itself able to direct and evaluate its comprehensive services in a more consistent and cohesive manner. GRYD used this framework to establish a set of guiding principles to drive practice and ensure the coordinated and effective implementation of all activities directed at the community, as well as the individual, family, and peer system. Furthermore, the framework established the components necessary to conduct process and outcome evaluations of its comprehensive strategy, such as goals, objectives, activities, and performance and outcome measures.

GRYD's unique structure enhances its ability to evaluate and direct service delivery in accordance with its conceptual framework. As a city office overseen by the Los Angeles mayor, the GRYD has the flexibility to take on multiple roles, make funding decisions, and take action quickly. With the support of the mayor and the approval of the city council, GRYD acts as a policy maker, able to address policy needs to support sustainable, comprehensive efforts and decide how to allocate funds. As a funder, GRYD promotes efficient distribution of resources and contracts with service providers working in

Los Angeles neighborhoods most affected by gang violence to implement prevention and intervention services that correspond with the GRYD strategies' conceptual framework.

Furthermore, GRYD is itself a program developer and service provider. It develops programming and implementation models for city-contracted service providers to follow. For example, the GRYD developed the Gang Prevention Model of Practice, an eight-phase prevention strategy based on coaching multiple generations of families in problem-solving techniques to reduce the risk factors associated with youth gang involvement. As a service provider, GRYD provides gang-impacted communities with direct services such as the Summer Night Lights initiative, a violence reduction effort coordinated by the GRYD office and designed to engage the family and community in prevention and intervention activities.

GRYD also supports city-contracted service providers with trainings and tools for delivering services that correspond with the goals and needs of the GRYD strategy. By providing ongoing training, GRYD increases the ability of service providers to implement effective and consistent practices. Moreover, this training ensures that, over time, all GRYD staff working with service providers can reinforce and support the GRYD strategy's conceptual framework and promote the strategy's sustainability.

Indeed, GRYD has a consistent message about its work and services that is important to sustaining the GRYD strategy: Los Angeles has a place-based, data-driven, family-focused plan to address gang violence. To disseminate and reinforce its message, GRYD works with the mayor and the communities affected by gangs. Whenever the mayor speaks about the GRYD strategy, he reiterates this message and utilizes findings from its data-driven efforts to highlight successes. Furthermore, when working with neighborhoods, GRYD utilizes its community education campaign to provide information about its services. GRYD's messaging campaign establishes a language and culture for the way Los Angeles thinks about gangs, gang-impacted communities, and the GRYD strategy.

Los Angeles provides one key recommendation for cities interested in directing and coordinating comprehensive strategies in a more cohesive manner: Ask city staff and local experts (e.g., service providers) what framework is driving programs. Identifying an existing framework – or building a preferred framework – will enhance the ability of cities to coordinate and drive their comprehensive plans and to evaluate their strategy.

CONCLUSION

The five cities profiled here have made substantial progress toward sustaining their comprehensive work by changing how city and county agencies do business and expanding comprehensive efforts more deeply into prevention and regional strategies. Other cities in California and nationwide may “take a page” from one or more of the California Cities Gang Prevention Network sites, directly borrowing and adapting approaches. Additional cities may draw inspiration from the five examples to develop their own innovations toward sustainability.

CITY-SPECIFIC RESOURCES

Los Angeles Gang Reduction

<http://mayor.lacity.org/Issues/GangReduction/index.htm>

The City of Los Angeles Mayor’s Office of Gang Reduction and Youth Development (GRYD)
Comprehensive Strategy, December 2011

Mayor’s Strategic Plan for Gang Prevention, City of Sacramento 2012-2015. Draft of January 6, 2012

Sacramento Reads! Third Grade Literacy Campaign
www.sacramentoreads.com

Sacramento Youth Development Services

www.cityofsacramento.org/Youth-Development/youth-and-gang-violence.cfm

Salinas Comprehensive Strategy for
Community-wide Violence Reduction

www.ci.salinaca.us/pdf/SalinasSWP.pdf

Salinas-Monterey County Community Alliance for
Safety and Peace

www.future-futuro.org

San Jose Mayor’s Gang Prevention Task Force

www.sanjoseca.gov/Mayor/goals/pubsafety/mgptf/mgptf.asp

Santa Rosa Mayor’s Gang Prevention Task Force

<http://ci.santa-rosaca.us/departments/recreationandparks/programs/MGPTF/Pages/default.aspx>

Way Up Sacramento

<http://wayupsacramento.org/>

GENERAL RESOURCES

California Cities Gang Prevention Network
www.ccgpn.org

National League of Cities Institute for Youth,
Education, and Families
www.nlc.org/iycf

National Forum on Youth Violence Prevention
www.fndyouthinfo.gov

Prevention Institute/UNITY Coalition
www.preventioninstitute.org/unity