

THE BILL BLACKWOOD
LAW ENFORCEMENT MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE OF TEXAS

Youth Gangs in Spring Branch Independent School District

A Research Project
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Professional Designation
Graduate, Management Institute

by
Louis R. Canales

Village Police Department
Houston, Texas
October, 1995

200

CONTENTS

I.	Introduction.....	3
II.	Ecological and Sociocultural Factors.....	4
III.	Gang Organization and Structure.....	7
	A. Types of gangs	
	B. Levels of gang membership	
IV.	Gang Activity.....	10
V.	Identifying Gang Presence In Schools.....	11
	A. Styles of dress	
	B. Tattoos	
	C. Graffiti	
VI.	Youth Gangs In Spring Branch I. S. D. - 1989.....	13
	A. Definition	
	B. Identified gangs	
	C. Gang activity	
	D. Police Department plan of action	
VII.	Youth Gangs In Spring Branch I. S. D. - 1995.....	15
	A. Identified gangs	
	B. Structure and activity	
	C. Police department activity and prevention programs	
	D. dentification criteria	
	E. New legislation	
VIII.	Conclusions and Recommendations.....	22
IX.	Bibliography.....	25

Introduction

The Spring Branch Independent School District, located in Houston, Texas, first identified the potential for a youth gang problem in 1989. The evidence was already there in the schools, and the district saw that a plan of action would be necessary to prevent the problem from getting out of hand. We now know that in spite of the early detection the problem of youth gangs has grown immensely, and in 1995 there is an ever growing concern regarding gang activity in the schools and community. In the six years since first acknowledging the problem, the number of identified gangs has more than tripled and the number of students involved has quadrupled. This is serious indeed and indicates the need for both school officials and law enforcement to have a thorough understanding of gangs. One of the reasons that society does not understand gangs very well is that there have not been enough systematic studies undertaken regarding the gang as an organization (Jankowski 1991). This paper reviews some of the more current literature, research, and legislation regarding gang activity and such a review should provide a framework for both school and law enforcement to evaluate current programs and to develop new plans and policies for combating the situation in ways that will be most productive. A comprehensive history and analysis comparing the problem in 1989 with that in 1995 will give rise to increased understanding. Additionally recommendations for educators will be provided.

Ecological and Sociocultural Factors

The potential of a gang problem in Spring Branch, as identified in 1989, was minimal but never the less identifiable. According to Michael W. Wichkowski, a former Spring Branch resident and fireman, prior to the 1980's the area was predominantly a white middle class suburb of the City of Houston. There is no recorded evidence of the presence of youth gangs during the 1970's. The area grew quickly and a building boom in the early 80's resulted in numerous multi-family apartment complexes as realtors quickly bought up surrounding land. There was a tremendous influx of Hispanic, Oriental, and black residents. The majority of these were of a lower socio-economic class. These men were typically construction laborers, truck drivers, yard workers, and other blue-collar workers. The Hispanics in particular were largely first or second generation Americans, who preferred to live in groups like themselves, often continuing to speak in their native language and not teaching their children to speak English (Wichkowski 1995). In the 1980's neighborhoods such as Spring Branch, because of their inexpensive housing and rapid turnover, were a natural point of entry for new arrivals to the city. However, as Ira Reiner points out in a report on gangs, crime, and violence in Los Angeles, the "reception committee" today is very different from what it was 45 or 70 years ago (Reiner 1992). For children arriving in established ethnic neighborhoods, the pressure to join a gang is powerful and immediate. According to Vigil (in Huff 1990, page 127), "For more practical and pragmatic purposes, these newcomers especially have learned youth street attributes as if they were learning about America--becoming 'assimilated' as one informant stated." Vigil further states (page 125), "In the words of another young immigrant, '[gang-banging is like] showing you are American' " (in Huff 1998, page 127).

The school district also grew, as many new school sites were built. Most of these were in the area north of Interstate 10. The youth gang problems have also been centered in this area. Robert W. Bigger, then police chief of Spring Branch I. S. D., stated in 1989 that youth gang activity was minimal, but the threat of future strengthening of the gangs or their influence could not be minimized or ignored. At the time, they were not hard-core cohesive groups, but rather transient entities that engaged in criminal activity and were able to disrupt normal school activities on an incidental basis (Bigger 1989).

Both school and law enforcement records indicate that the problem has increased in frequency as well as severity. A July 9, 1995 article in the Houston Chronicle showed that Spring Branch Independent School District currently has a student population of 28,000 in twenty three schools serving a forty four square mile area. Mike Fleming, a current member of the Spring Branch Police Department Gang Task Force, stated that about 47% of the youth gangs in the schools are Hispanic. It is his belief that the most common reasons are the breakdown of the family as a cohesive unit and desperate poverty. Fleming stated, "Sadly, a map of the gang area of the Spring Branch I. S. D. overlays a poverty map of the same area almost identically".

Review of current literature indicates that there are numerous opinions regarding the reasons youngsters join gangs. The relationship between abuse and delinquency has been explored by many researchers. In a 1994 study of the Crips and Bloods, Fleisher found that almost without exception, the gang members "grow up in dangerous family environments" (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention 1994). Abuse results in the "abused" using aggression as a means of solving problems, being unable to feel empathy for others, and having a diminished ability to cope with stress (Siegel and Senna 1991). Underlying factors examined by

Vigil include residential segregation in low income areas, poverty, poor school performance, little parental supervision, discrimination, and distrust of law enforcement (Vigil 1988). Some individuals from certain ethnic groups, particularly the Chicanos and Irish, join gangs because they see participation as a form of commitment to community, especially when the gangs have existed for generations. They feel as if they are expected to join the gang (Jankowski 1991). A common characteristic of many who join gangs is defiant individualism. Although this term indicates that a person is a loner, the decision to join a gang is based on the fact that the individual believes that the gang is capable of providing him with a number of advantages that he would not be able to enjoy as fully on his own, without benefit of the gang (Jankowski 1991). Vigil (in Huff, 1990, page 61) also found that a sense of belonging is a reason for becoming a gang member. He stated, "Gang membership affords a clearly defined set of peers with whom friendship and family-like relationships (carnalismo) are mandated". Jankowski summarized the reasons why individuals join gangs:

It is important to reemphasize that people choose to join for a variety of reasons, that these reasons are not exclusive of one another (some members have more than one), that gangs are composed of individuals whose reasons for joining include all those mentioned, that the decision to join is thought out, and that the individual believes this was best for his or her interests at the moment (Jankowski 1991, page 47).

Gang Organization and Structure

The majority of researchers have concluded that gang structure is usually loose, and that the gangs are usually not the cohesive groups one would suspect. However, some studies have shown gangs to be quite cohesive (Jankowski 1991). Taylor (in Huff 1990) describes three different motivational categories of gangs. He believes that the first two, scavenger and territorial, are growth stages into the third, an organized/corporate gang. The scavenger gangs are loose groups with leadership constantly changing. They commit crimes just for the fun of it, with little or no purpose or planning. Members are usually low achievers from the lower class and underclass (Huff 1990). Territorial gangs are those that designate something as being "theirs"-what is often referred to as turf. These gangs defend their territory in order to protect their particular business. Physical violence is the method of protection used. This stage is an outgrowth of the scavenger gang once it decides to organize (Huff 1990). Further development and growth may lead to an organized/corporate gang. These have very strong leaders and criminal actions are committed for a purpose, not for fun. At this stage, members are generally adults, and they are promoted based on their abilities. The crime families of the Mafia represent organized/corporate gangs, but some of the more famous members began their careers in the scavenger gangs (Huff 1990).

The Texas Attorney General's Office lists four types of gangs currently active in this state. The first and least dangerous is the delinquent youth gang in which the youth use traditional identifying signs, hang out together, and dress alike, but do not commit serious crimes in the community. The second category, the turf-based gangs, are driven by gang rivalry and are often involved in fights and also in shootings. Gain-oriented gangs, the third type, commit profitable crimes. This type of gang

includes both youth and adults, and they are more secretive about their illegal activities. The last group is the violent/hate gangs which includes the racist and Satanist gangs. Their violent acts are usually random and/or senseless (Buhmann 1992).

In 1992, Sergeant Boxeman of the Houston Police Department testified before the Attorney General that there were 103 criminal street gangs and one violent/hate gang in the Houston area, but there were no Satanic gangs. He added that there were 1500 confirmed hard-core gang members in Houston at that time (Morales 1992). V. R. Bond, in a training handout for the Harris County Sheriff's Department, stated that youth gang structure ranges from a loose-knit group of individuals who know each other and commit crimes together, to a formal organization with a leader or ruling council and written rules and regulations. Not all gangs have leaders. Local gangs are usually organized along ethnic lines being comprised of Asian, black, Hispanic, or white groups. Bond believes that although youth gangs organize themselves according to ethnicity, they are not representative of the ethnic community of which they are a part (Harris County Sheriff's Department 1991). In the same report, Bond explains the involvement by gang members by levels.

1. The Hard-core - Those few who need to thrive on the totality of the gang activity. The gang's level is determined by the hard-cores and their ability to orchestrate the gang as a vehicle to manifest their own violence. They may participate in violent acts or encourage others to commit the violence. They are usually liked and respected by the gang members and tolerated by others.
2. The Associates - Those who associate with the group for the status and recognition. They wear club jackets, attend social functions, and may even have gang tattoos. This association fulfills the emotional need of belonging.

3. **The Peripheral - Those who move in and out on the basis of interest in the activities of the gang.**
4. **Cliques - The gang may further be broken down into cliques or groups, which are usually determined by age or geographical areas. This term may also be used synonymously with the term gang, barrio, neighborhood, or hood (Harris County Sheriff's Department 1992).**

Gang Activity

Gang activity is a difficult term to define, because it is different things to different people. Gang members usually refer to their activities as "banging" or "gang banging". According to the Street Gang Detail of Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, many of their activities are shared by the general public. However, when a gang is involved in a "fund-raising car wash, a weekend party, or even a family picnic, the potential for violence and criminal activity is far greater than for any other group of people" (Block 1992). The causes of street gang violence are many and varied. It could be due to a desire for revenge for a real or imagined wrongdoing, or due to competition for control over a particular criminal enterprise such as narcotics or extortion (Bond 1992). These are situations which, in the mind of the gang or gang member, call for violent acts. It is important to understand that the situation is not the real cause and that the actual root causes include fear, ambition, testing, and frustration (Jankowski 1991). Generally, the type of activity most associated with youth gangs is the drive-by shooting. This is usually a revenge type activity practiced by members and unfortunately very often the victim is not a gang member (Bond 1992). Within the schools, gang activity is evidenced by vandalism, arson, and graffiti. A teacher can be rendered powerless to maintain discipline or teach if there are several gang members in the class (Block 1992). As youth gangs have become more sophisticated, their weapons have evolved from fists, feet, and knives to handguns, automatic weapons, and sawed-off shotguns (Bond 1992).

Identifying Gang Presence In Schools

Styles of Dress

One of the earliest methods used in the identification of gang members in the schools was based on their appearance. Generally, gang members display a common identifier such as the color or style of clothing (Dunston 1992). There are several different types of headgear worn. The watch cap is used most in the Winter. It is a knit cap pulled low over the ears with a small roll at the bottom. Sometimes gang members wear narrow brimmed hats pulled low to the eyebrows. The narrow brim is referred to as a stingy brim. Baseball caps are also frequently worn by members. Some of the gangs will turn the bill up and write their gang name or the name or nickname of the owner. Often the bandanna, also known as a dew rag or moco rag, is used as headgear. It is folded length wise and worn on the forehead tied in back (Bond 1992). Hispanic gang members traditionally wear Pendleton style or long sleeve plaid flannel shirts. The more identifiable feature is the fact that the shirt is buttoned only at the collar and otherwise left open (Block 1992). In the summer, Hispanic gang members sport T-shirts that are several sizes too large, worn outside the trousers which are usually khaki. The open style and the large size of the T-shirt allow the members to conceal weapons in the waistband of the pants (Bond 1992). Members will wear either cloth or leather shoes which display the gang's colors (Bond 1992).

Tattoos

Tattoos have long been associated with gang affiliation, but they become more important when observed in combination with other identifying signs. There is no one tattoo used by all gang members, but if several youth display the same tattoo, it could be an indication of gang membership. One particular gang will use their logo

tattooed anywhere on the right side of their bodies. Another identifier, related to tattoos, is cigarette burns. They appear to be a mark of courage or "machismo" and the more a member has, the worse or "crazier" he is (Block 1992).

Graffiti

The appearance of graffiti is representative of vandalism or childish pranks to many members of the public, but to the youth gang member, it is a mark of territorial boundaries and a warning to rival gangs (Block 1992). The old saying that "a picture is worth a thousand words" is particularly true with respect to gang communication (Dunston 1992). Symbols are used in specific ways to convey explicit messages to rival gangs. Graffiti battles have gone on for many decades where much talent and dedication is evident in the outstanding symbols and calligraphy, or fancy writing, used by the various gangs (Bonsanto undated). There are several specific indicators which are important in understanding the intended message. The significance of the symbols used cannot be ignored or taken lightly. Symbols that appear upside down or are marked out are an indication of disrespect toward another gang. Monikers (nicknames) are used to display a warning or message to a particular individual. The color of paint used in the graffiti also gives evidence to a certain gang (Dunston 1992). The most important thing to remember is that "The purpose of all youth gang graffiti is to glorify the gang" (Block 1992).

Youth Gangs in Spring Branch I. S. D. - 1989

Definition

When Robert W. Bigger prepared a report on the Youth Gang situation in Spring Branch I. S. D. in 1989, he acknowledged the presence of gangs but believed at the time that most were active in other parts of the Houston area and problems just occasionally spilled over into S. B. I. S. D. At that time it was known that La Raza and Crocodiles had youth gang affiliates on some school campuses. The school district police department was also aware of a Crip's group, but it was generally ineffective at the time (Bigger 1989). In 1989, the definition of a gang used by the school district was as follows:

A group of individuals who meet all of the following criteria:

- a. They have a name or an identifiable leadership;
- b. They maintain a geographic, economic, or criminal enterprise area (turf);
- c. They associate on a continuous or regular basis; and
- d. They engage in delinquent or criminal activity (Bigger 1989).

Identified Gangs

It appears that gang activity in 1989 was concentrated on the Northbrook Senior High School campus. There were a total of 7 gangs identified in Spring Branch I. S. D. with an estimated membership of 100 students. It is not known if there were any girls involved. Members were in the 15 to 18 year age groups. The majority of these gangs were predominantly Hispanic. Known gangs included:

1. Northbrook Posse
2. Los Locos (La Raza)
3. Skaters
4. Stoners
5. Latin Kings
6. Latin Counts
7. International Mafia (Bigger 1989)

Gang Activity

At the time, the gangs were not well organized and leadership changed regularly. There was little formal leadership. The youth gangs did engage in criminal activity, but it was on an incidental basis which disrupted normal school activities. The damage to Spring Branch I. S. D. property was approximately \$5,000.00 for the school year.

Police Department Plan of Action

The School District Police Department had no officers assigned to a gang task unit in 1989. There were only 10 to 20 reported incidents which required investigation in that year. The schools had no prevention programs in place. (Bigger 1989).

Activities by the Spring Branch I. S. D. Police Department centered around investigation and information gathering. The focus was on determining the number of youth involved in each gang at each school, the impact on the student population, any affiliation with older, established gangs, and what major criminal activities each gang was involved in. There was an effort to coordinate information and analysis with other school districts and police departments in the area, cataloging each gang by name, geographic area, campus, membership, and criminal enterprise (Bigger 1989).

Chief Bigger suggested a plan of action for S. B. I. S. D. which included:

- I. Continue the Spring Branch I. S. D. Police Department activities currently in place.
- II. Create an awareness among district administrators and faculty of the nature of youth gangs and gang activity and aid in identifying students who are members of a gang.
- III. Enforce existing State Education Code sections that deal with secret societies and/or fraternities and sororities through the administration at the local campus.
- IV. Make available counseling resources in an effort to reduce the gang membership.
- V. Increase public awareness to the extent that it is for positive results and not for causing unjustified fear (Bigger 1989).

Youth Gangs in Spring Branch I. S. D. - 1995

The youth gang situation in 1995 is a very different one from that in 1989. One result is that there is now a Spring Branch Independent School District Police Department Gang Task Force, formed in 1993. Mike Fleming, a member of the gang task force, provided, in several interviews, a comparison of the current youth gang situation with the problem as first identified in 1989. According to Fleming, gangs now are more gain-oriented rather than territorial. Violence has progressed to the point that gang members have the most sophisticated weapons available and are willing to use them against private citizens and law enforcement as well as rival gangs. Making money is the focus of gang activity, and rival gangs that infringe on business ventures are the enemies. Gang members sell drugs, burglarize, rob, and carjack to obtain funds.

Identified Gangs

Spring Branch I. S. D. Police now have identified 24 youth gangs active in the schools. The most active ones with identifying information include;

1. **Northwest Lynch Mob - "NWLM"**
Colors: Royal blue. Crip affiliate.
Schools: Northbrook Sr., Spring Woods Middle, Northbrook Middle.
2. **Playboy Mafia - "PBM"**
Colors: Black and white. Also associated with the P.L.C. and J.Q.A. at this time. Hispanic low-rider gang.
Schools: Spring Woods Sr., Northbrook Sr., Spring Oaks Middle, Spring Woods Middle, Memorial Middle, Landrum Middle.
3. **Rollin 60's Crips**
Colors: Royal blue. Crip gang.
Schools: Spring Woods Sr., Spring Oaks Middle, Spring Branch Middle, Memorial Middle. Possible Spring Forest Middle. Note: The possibility exists that there are small numbers of Rollin 60's in all of Spring Branch's middle and high schools.

4. **J.Q.A. - "Together We Assassinate"**
Colors: Black-background El Salvadoran. Reside in Hollister and Pitner area.
Schools: Northbrook Sr., Northbrook Middle. Possible - Landrum Middle.
5. **P.L.C. - "Primero Los Carnales"**
Means "First the Homeboys"
Colors: Black/white. Close associates of the JQA and the PBM's at this time.
Schools: Landrum Middle, Northbrook Sr.
6. **CPD - Carverdale Posse**
Colors: None specific. Dress: Khakis, flannel shirts.
Schools: Northbrook Middle, Spring Woods Middle, Landrum Middle, Northbrook Sr., Spring Woods Sr.
7. **VLV - "Vato Locco Varrios"**
Colors: None specific. Dress: Khakis, flannel shirts.
Schools: Northbrook Middle, Northbrook Sr. Possible - Spring Woods Sr., Spring Woods Middle.
8. **WSI - "Westside Indies"**
Colors: None specific - have been seen in orange and green, the Miami Hurricane's colors.
Schools: Stratford Sr., Possible - Spring Forest Middle, Spring Woods, Sr., Spring Oaks Middle.

Structure and Activity

It is known that at least 488 students are involved in the gangs and of that number 65 are girls. Members in 1995 range in age from 13 to 17, providing evidence of the fact that younger children are now joining the gangs. Approximately 60% to 70% of the gang members in S.B.I.S.D. are Hispanic, 10% to 15% are black, and the remainder are Asian and white (Hughson 1995).

The youth gangs today are much more structured than those in 1989, and the leadership is more organized, utilizing positions such as commanders, lieutenants, and foot soldiers. Members serve specific purposes within the gang and promotion within the structure is based on "job performance".

Officer Fleming stated that damage and destruction to Spring Branch I. S. D. property has increased in direct proportion to the increase in gang members. In the 1994-1995 school year damage totaled \$30,000 to \$40,000. During the school year officers received 165 cases, incidents, and calls, with 154 of these involving identified gang members. According to Sergeant Jeanne Hughson with the Spring Branch I. S. D. Police Department, assaults account for the majority of the incidents in which known gang members are involved.

Police Department Activity and Prevention Programs

The Spring Branch I. S. D. Police Department, now under the direction of Chief Chuck Brawner, includes two officers assigned to work full time in conjunction with the Houston Police Department's Gang Task Force (Fleming 1995).

The school district currently has two formal prevention programs in place. These are D.A.R.E. and G.R.E.A.T. Each of these programs is offered by specially-trained, uniformed police officers. D. A. R. E. stands for Drug Abuse Resistance Education. It was first started in 1987 as a national effort to reach students before they became involved with drugs. The core curriculum is aimed at fifth and sixth grade students with optional programs from kindergarten through high school. The course is taught in 45 minute to hour long sessions over a period of 17 weeks. Besides teaching students about drugs, lessons are included to improve self-esteem and give students ways to resist peer pressure (Houston Chronicle 1994). G.R.E.A.T., Gang Resistance Education and Training, was developed in 1991 by the Phoenix Police Department, in cooperation with surrounding Valley agencies. The goal is to reduce gang involvement. As of May 1994, 650 officers from 276 police agencies in 37 states have been trained to present the curriculum. The program targets seventh grade students. The police officers work with teachers using optional and extended activities which reinforce classroom instruction. G.R.E.A.T. students are given the chance to discover for themselves the ramifications of gang violence

through structured exercises and interactive approaches to learning. There is a follow-up summer program which builds on skills from the classroom and provides students with a chance to develop cognitive, social, and self-esteem building skills (G.R.E.A.T. Training Information Packet 1994). D.A.R.E. officer, J. D. Key stated that in studying the effectiveness of the D.A.R.E. elementary and junior high school programs, one must consider the local perception of the programs by citizens and school district officials as well as national studies or evaluations. In a May 1992 evaluation of D.A.R.E. by Dr. Kathleen M. Wulf of Wulf Educational Services, three pilot schools were tested before and after the program in the Los Angeles Unified School District. Several statistical methods were used in data analysis including percentages, means, standard deviations, and item analysis techniques. The following conclusions were drawn: Student's opinions of D.A.R.E. remained quite positive; student knowledge increased significantly between pre and post tests; teachers reported student participation was outstanding; and nearly half of the students reported they had already had used some of the resistance techniques learned in the program.

Locally, in the Spring Branch Independent School District, response from the four elementary schools and one junior high has been very good. The Village Police Department has expanded the D.A.R.E. program into two private schools at the school's request due to favorable reports from the public schools.

The citizens have such a positive perception of D.A.R.E. and G.R.E.A.T. as a benefit to their children that they just got City Council to approve another full-time officer/instructor for next year. The Village's one high school has also requested continuation of D.A.R.E. in the ninth and tenth grades. The overall community response to these two prevention programs has been very positive for the Village Police Department. Stratford High School in Spring Branch I.S.D. started a new program during the 93-94 school year called D.E.F.Y. or Drug Education For Youth,

named after the foundation which was established to safeguard drug education programs. According to Mr. Charles Kershner, assistant principal at Stratford, the program was started with only 30-40 students. Unlike D.A.R.E. and G.R.E.A.T., D.E.F.Y. is presented by regular school personnel. High school students go through extensive training which, beginning in the 95-96 school year includes actual classroom instruction and an organization which meets after school. There are now over 100 students active in the program at Stratford. When the training is completed the students go into the elementary schools as mentors who work in various capacities. Working with only a couple of elementary schools at a time, they form relationships much like Big Brothers/Big Sisters with the younger children. Currently, D.E.F.Y. is offered only at Stratford High. Mr. Kershner stated that elementary schools are very eager to participate in the program and that they have high hopes for the success of this approach.

Identification Criteria

Mike Fleming stressed that although statistics for 1995 show a tremendous growth of the gang problem, it is important to remember that the criteria and definition of gang activity have also gone through a major change since 1989. He stated that there are many difficulties in cataloging and identifying youth gangs and gang members in a way that would be consistent within different agencies, cities, and other jurisdictions because each jurisdiction has its own definition and criteria for the identification of youth gangs and criminal activities attributed to the gangs. Chapter 71 of the Texas Penal Code, ORGANIZED CRIME AND CRIMINAL STREET GANGS, section (d) describes a "Criminal Street Gang" as three or more persons having a common identifying sign or symbol or an identifiable leadership who continuously or regularly associate in the commission of criminal activities (Morales 1992). Law enforcement generally has problems with this criteria particularly because it could affect people other than gang members. There are indications that a standardized criteria should be established in which a gang member would have to

meet at least one of the criteria listed. Other states such as California and Florida have already addressed the problem and have adopted more stringent criteria (Morales 1992). Recently, the Houston Police Department established a stringent labeling criteria which is used citywide by all gang officers. According to Mike Fleming, this criteria is also used by Spring Branch Independent School District. The single most important criteria for identification is self-admission, "the only criteria which, alone, can serve as the sole determining factor in whether or not an individual is documented as a gang member" (Houston Police Department 1995). The total list of the criteria used are as follows:

1. Self-admission by a member
2. Investigation in gang crime
3. Member statement
4. Witness statement
5. Criminal informant statement
6. Law enforcement statement
7. Criminal association/business association
8. Name on gang member roster
9. Seen with a gang member
10. Wearing of gang colors or clothing
11. Gang tattoos

If self-admission is not available, then two or more of the criteria must be used to formally document a person as a gang member. This provides some continuity and consistency in the collection of information on gang members.

New Legislation

Another important legislative development is the May 1995 passage of House Bill 466 in the Texas Legislature. This law allows criminal justice agencies to keep "gang books" on both adult and juvenile gang members and associates. Specifically, the law allows the "compilation" of "criminal information" on "criminal combinations". In the Texas Penal Code, Section 71.02 a "combination" is defined as "three or more persons who collaborate in carrying on criminal activities, although

(1) participants may not know each other's identity, (2) membership in the combination may change from time to time, and (3) participants may stand in a wholesaler-retailer or other arms-length relationship in illicit distribution operations" (Ogg 1995).

The new law also defines criminal information as facts, material, photographs, or data reasonably related to the investigation or prosecution of criminal activity. Information collected may be compiled on paper, by computer, or in any other useful manner, into a local system. A statewide database is prohibited (Ogg 1995).

Under the new law, criminal information on adults and juveniles can be legally shared with any other criminal justice agency, anywhere, "upon request". Harris County maintains a database called G.R.I.T.S., Gang-Related Information Tracking System, which other agencies within the county can participate in. This system was modeled after the California system called G.R.E.A.T. Even though data cannot be compiled in a statewide system, it can be shared with other agencies, courts, and defendants or their attorneys, anywhere in the State or even another State. Information cannot be released to anyone else. This information can only be used for the administration of justice. Any other use will result in civil or criminal liability. The law states that information can only be saved for a period of two years unless the person is charged with a crime subject to prosecution. In that case, the information can be retained for another two years (Ogg 1995). Mike Fleming stated that this new law, along with the criteria set out by the Houston Police Department, will greatly enhance law enforcement's ability to properly document or label individuals as gang members. Prior to these advances, the challenge for law enforcement had been to place the gang member label only on those individuals who they could be reasonably sure were truly gang members, while preserving and protecting democracy and individual rights (Houston Police Department 1995).

Conclusions and Recommendations

In 1989, when Chief Robert W. Bigger reported to Spring Branch I. S. D. administrators that they should neither minimize nor ignore the possibility of the future strengthening of gangs and their influence on the schools within the district, his perception proved to be true even beyond what he could have imagined at the time. Law enforcement addressed the problem with determination, but also with caution, because there was a desire to protect the public from unjustified fear. Current statistics clearly indicate a significant growth in the number of active youth gangs as well as the number of youth involved in the gangs. Children are joining gangs at a younger age and are participating in more serious and violent crimes. Their weapons are more sophisticated, and they use them more often, with deadly results. There is more organization within the gangs and a greater trend toward the desire for financial gain. Gang members have greater influence in the schools, are more disruptive in classes, and use more intimidation against teachers and administrators. The school district police must devote more of their resources to the problems caused by these young people. The problems were met with a plan of action that seemed adequate in 1989, but time has proven that a much more aggressive plan would be necessary to at least stabilize the growth of youth gangs. In 1995, the Spring Branch I.S.D. Police Department has officers who are specifically trained to deal with youth gang problems. They are now coordinating their efforts with other school districts and law enforcement agencies. New laws have been passed which allow police officers to compile and maintain records based on standardized criteria for the identification of gang members. The schools have implemented programs which are intended to deter students from participation in gangs and develop the self-esteem they need to resist negative peer pressure.

It is apparent that administrators and law enforcement in Spring Branch Independent School District have accepted that a youth gang problem does exist, and they have begun to implement programs that address the issue. The effort for prevention seems to be centered in the schools. However, there needs to be more involvement from the community because they also own a share of the problem and its solutions. Different professional disciplines should be included. In order to see that the goals of the schools and the community are being met, there needs to be a partnership between the different professional and community entities that are affected by the youth gang activity, such as businesses, social groups, residents, and civic clubs in addition to the schools and law enforcement. To that end, the Spring Branch I. S. D. Police officers now make presentations to civic organizations and other community groups. These groups are thus becoming more aware of the problem and, it is hoped, will become more involved in efforts to stop the youth gang trends. A 1993 article in the Houston Chronicle on violence in the schools quoted Gayle Fallon, president of the Houston Federation of Teachers, "Communities need to help deal with the problem because alternative education programs are very expensive, and expelling students from school is not always the best solution. Expelled youngsters only turn to gang activity and street crime". It is generally agreed that more parental involvement in the schools would be a positive factor. In Galveston County schools, parents have begun a program in which they patrol the halls. The parents are not there in the role of enforcer, but rather to help school administrators in terms of monitoring the halls and activities, discouraging intruders and discouraging trancies from classes. These volunteers also hope to provide support for children who lack guidance and support at home (Houston Chronicle 1993).

The G.R.I.T.S. program, in which all law enforcement agencies in Harris County are participating, should provide a valuable link in the identification of gang

members. Coordination of information is vital to consistently track the activities of identified gang members.

Only time will tell if programs, interventions, and other such efforts will make a difference in Spring Branch Independent School District. Several researchers, including Bing (1991) believe that the attitude of most people is that as long as gangs stay in their own neighborhoods, as long as they only war with each other, then they can pretty much be ignored. It is only when their activities have a direct impact on middle or upper class groups that a call to action is made. We have got to understand the gang members as "individuals" and deal with them on that basis. To expect one solution to work in all situations is unrealistic and ignores the basic principles of social change. Spergel and Curry, in an examination of various strategies and their effectiveness in dealing with the youth gang problem, concluded that "community mobilization and more resources for and reform of the educational system and the job market, targeted at gang youth or clearly at-risk youth, would be more cost-effective as well as more effective in the reduction of the problem" (in Huff 1990, page 309).

Bibliography

Books

- Bing, Leon. Do or Die. New York: Harper Collins, 1991.
- Dunston, Mark S. Street Signs. Powers Lake, Wisconsin: Performance Dimensions Publishing, 1992.
- Huff, C. Ronald. Gangs In America. Bakersfield, California: Sage Publishing, 1990.
- Jankowski, Martin Sanchez. Islands In the Street. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991.
- Vigil, James Diego. Barrio Gangs: Street Life and Identity In Southern California. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988.

Reports

- Bigger, Robert W. "Youth Gangs in S.B.I.S.D." April 1989. (Photocopy).
- Bonsanto, Vincent S. "Street Gang Investigative Guide" Cook County, Illinois, undated.
- Bonsanto, Vincent S. "Street Gang Paraphernalia-Searches" Cook County, Illinois, Undated.
- Buhmann, Elizabeth. "Interim Report to the 73rd Texas Legislature" Austin, Texas, 1992.
- Phoenix Police Department. "Gang Resistance Education and Training" Training Manual Excerpt, undated, photocopy.
- Houston Police Department. "Gang Member Labeling Criteria: A Strict Model" Houston, Texas, 1995.
- Harris County Sheriff's Department Gang Unit Training Manual, Houston, Texas: Sheriff's Department, 1992.
- Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department. "L.A. Style-A Street Gang Manual of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department" Sheriff's Department, 1992.
- McBride, Wes. "Street Gangs-A National Law Enforcement Perspective", undated, photocopy.

Morales, Dan. "The 1992 Texas Attorney General's Gang Report" Austin, Texas, 1992.

Ogg, Kimbra. "Gang Crime Legislative Update: June 1995" Houston, Texas, 1995.

Reiner, Ira. "Gangs, Crime, and Violence in Los Angeles" Los Angeles, 1992.

Newspaper Articles

Greenwood, Cynthia. "Juvenile Justice: Judges getting tough on young offenders". The Houston Reader, 13 September 1995.

Marlowe, Kristina and Rhodes, Steve. "Anti-drug campaign DARE is criticized". The Houston Chronicle, 6 November 1994.

Markley, Melanie. "Teachers take a stand against troublemakers". The Houston Chronicle, 6 November 1994.

Moran, Kevin. "Isle parents control halls to keep order in schools". The Houston Chronicle, 3 April 1993.

Personal Interviews

Fleming, Mike, Officer with Spring Branch I. S. D. Police Department Youth Gang Task Force. July-August 1995.

Hughson, Jeanne, Sergeant with Spring Branch I. S. D. Police Department. August 1995.

Kershner, Charles, Assistant Principal, Stratford Senior High School. Telephone Interview, October 1995.

Key, J. D., D.A.R.E. Officer, Village Police Department, October 1995.

Wichkowski, Michael W., Resident in Spring Branch I. S. D. August, 1995.