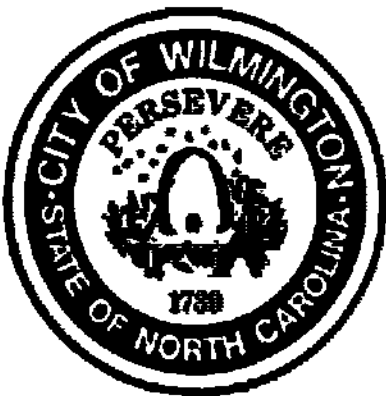


# Herman Goldstein Award

for Excellence in Problem Oriented Policing

## Gang Intervention Task Force "Youth Violence Intervention Program"



*The City of Wilmington Police Department  
In collaboration with the New Hanover County Sheriff's Department and  
New Hanover County Regional Medical center*

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*Chief John H. Cease*

# Gang Intervention Task Force

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*Sherif Joseph McQueen*

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### **"YOUTH VIOLENCE INTERVENTION PROGRAM"**

The Wilmington, New Hanover County area is experiencing a large transient population and rapid growth. The community began to show the traditional signs of youth gang involvement. The number of gang members, potential gang members and young people involved in at risk behavior remained unidentified. The police and sheriffs department had very little information or statistical data on youth gangs within the community.

The Wilmington - New Hanover County Gang Intervention Task Force Project, unlike other gang units and task forces in the United States, implements a combination of prevention, intervention, counseling and suppression strategies to address the many factors that cause and sustain the problem of juvenile violence.

The Gang Intervention Task Force leads a collaborative approach to the intervention of youth violence through a multifaceted effort between law enforcement, community service agencies, schools, court system, probation/parole and the medical community. The gang task force provides intelligence support for all units within the Police and Sheriffs Department along with intelligence gathering and support for law enforcement/probation parole in the three counties surrounding New Hanover County.

The Social Worker in this unit provides services through a system of information and referral and as liaison between the community, community service agencies, school and the juvenile court system. The process involves, but is not be limited to, using the schools as an education component by means of after school programs and tutoring, the juvenile court counselor for intensive supervision and diversion, the judiciary for removal of the serious chronic offender, service agencies for counseling, parenting classes, the medical community for data collection and services and the community itself by providing community service projects, mentors, and structured recreation activities.

As a result of this project over thirty youth gang sets and 700 members of those sets are identified along with other threat groups within the community. These groups are a mixture of adults and juveniles. Over 1,\$00 youth are identified as gang associates and are at risk for gang membership. The numbers of adults and youth involved in gang behavior in the Wilmington, New Hanover County areas is still being determined by this project.

From a law enforcement perspective, the Community Policing philosophy allows law enforcement officers to suppress violent youth activity, by identifying gang members, identifying community "hot spots", arrest and incarcerate repeat violent offenders, as well as gather and share intelligence data.

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The City of Wilmington and New Hanover County area is the metropolitan hub of a three county area and is the home to 145,845 residents of diverse ethnic backgrounds. Wilmington is listed nationally as one of the fastest growing cities in the United States. New Hanover County is a peninsula bordering the Atlantic Ocean and the Cape Fear River in Southeastern North Carolina. Two adjoining rural Counties, Brunswick (population 61,295) and Pender (population 36,284) affects New Hanover County's crime.

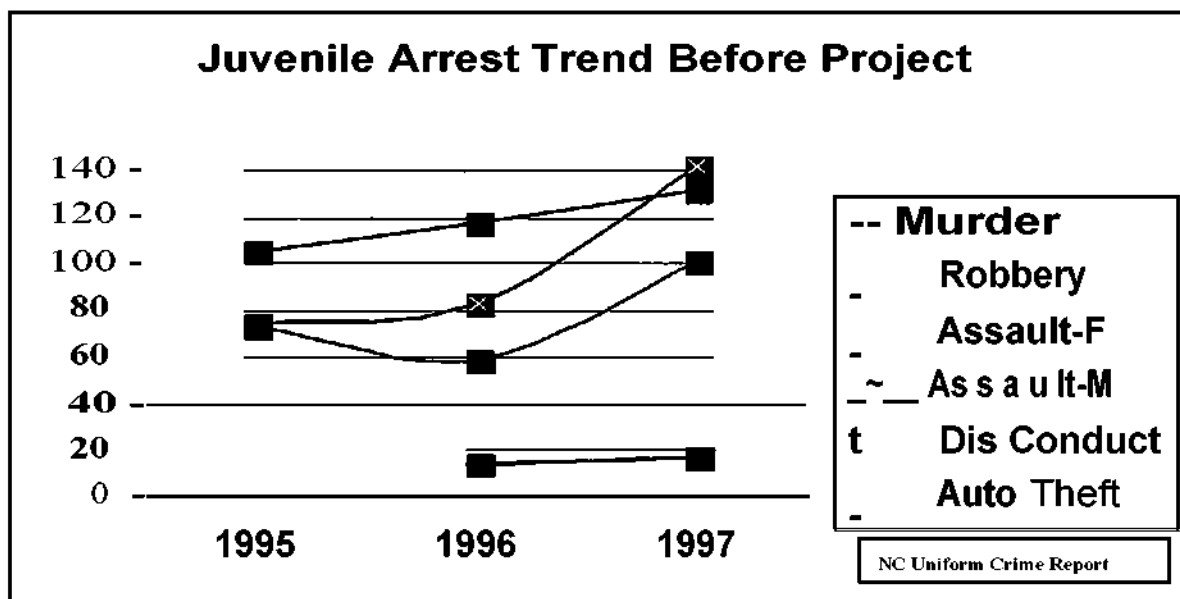
## THE PROBLEM

Wilmington and New Hanover County are experiencing youth gang related activity and crime. The question was how to prevent youth from being involved in street gang and criminal activity.

The City of Wilmington is identified by the Federal Bureau of Investigation as a fourth level City for gang development and activity. In addition, New Hanover County is ranked fourteenth in North Carolina for Part I crime arrests, third in the State in training school admissions and eleventh in the State in Juvenile arrests. These are prime conditions for development of gang problems.

According to Dr. Ron Huff of Ohio State University, gang members begin their criminal activity by committing misdemeanor and property crimes. The members then graduate to violent crimes and drug trafficking. Studies show that the peak recruitment for gang members is between grades five and eight. Statistics for 1994 through 1998 in the Wilmington - New Hanover County area are indicators of a rise in gang activity in the area. By convention, property damage (in the form of graffiti), motor vehicle theft, robbery, aggravated assault, drug offenses and murder are considered the types of crimes used as a measurement for an increase in gang activity.

Nationally and statewide, crime appears to be on a downward trend. However, Wilmington and New Hanover County showed significant increases in juvenile violent crime arrests before this project began. The social condition of juveniles in New Hanover County is bleak:



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<sup>1</sup>A sampling of 1997 total data (arrests of juveniles) over the previous year (1996) for New Hanover County:

*An increase in juvenile arrests for murder*  
*42% increase in juvenile arrests for aggravated assault*  
*11% increase in juvenile arrests for simple assault*  
*18% increase in juvenile arrests for robbery*  
*42% increase in juvenile arrests for disorderly conduct*  
*56% increase in juvenile drug arrests*  
*22% increase in juvenile arrests for vandalism and property damage*  
*11% increase in juvenile arrests overall for Part I offenses.*

<sup>2</sup>FY 1997-1998 Juveniles ages 6-15

*Juvenile Intake processed 1,478 delinquency and 126 undisciplined complaints*  
*3<sup>rd</sup> in the State in training school admissions,*  
*39 juveniles under 16 committed to training school: 128 placed in secure detention*  
*425 arrests of 16 and 17 year olds for 1998 (16 and 17 year olds treated as adults in NC)*  
*The area is 6<sup>th</sup> in the State in reported cases of child abuse, neglect and dependency,*  
*The highest percentage of citizens living in public housing in the State.*

## STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

**The purpose of the program is to identify juveniles participating in criminal gang related or motivated activity and divert those youth to an alternative program(s), if they meet the criteria for diversion. Diversion is used to allow an alternative to criminal prosecution and reduces the workload on the Juvenile Justice system. This is done with the expectation of preventing further criminal involvement**

## TASK FORCE STRUCTURE

The City County Gang Intervention Task Force operates from an office located in a low income, high crime, housing community. The Wilmington Police Department and New Hanover County Sheriffs Department each detailed 2 experienced officers and 2 experienced deputies to the unit. A Social Worker and Crime Analyst are also assigned to the unit. A Sergeant from the Wilmington Police Department Detective Division supervises the Task Force. A Captain acts as Project Director. During the first year of operation many other public and private agencies joined the Task Force through Governor Hunt's "Communities That Care Project".

## PROJECT OPERATION

**The Social Worker:** The innovative uniqueness and key to the success of the project is the Social Worker. The Social Worker is employed by the City County Gang Task Force and is supervised by the Task Force Supervisor. The Social Worker provides services through a system of information and referral and acts as liaison between Law Enforcement and:

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<sup>1</sup> Crime in North Carolina 1994 to 1998 Uniform Crime Reports

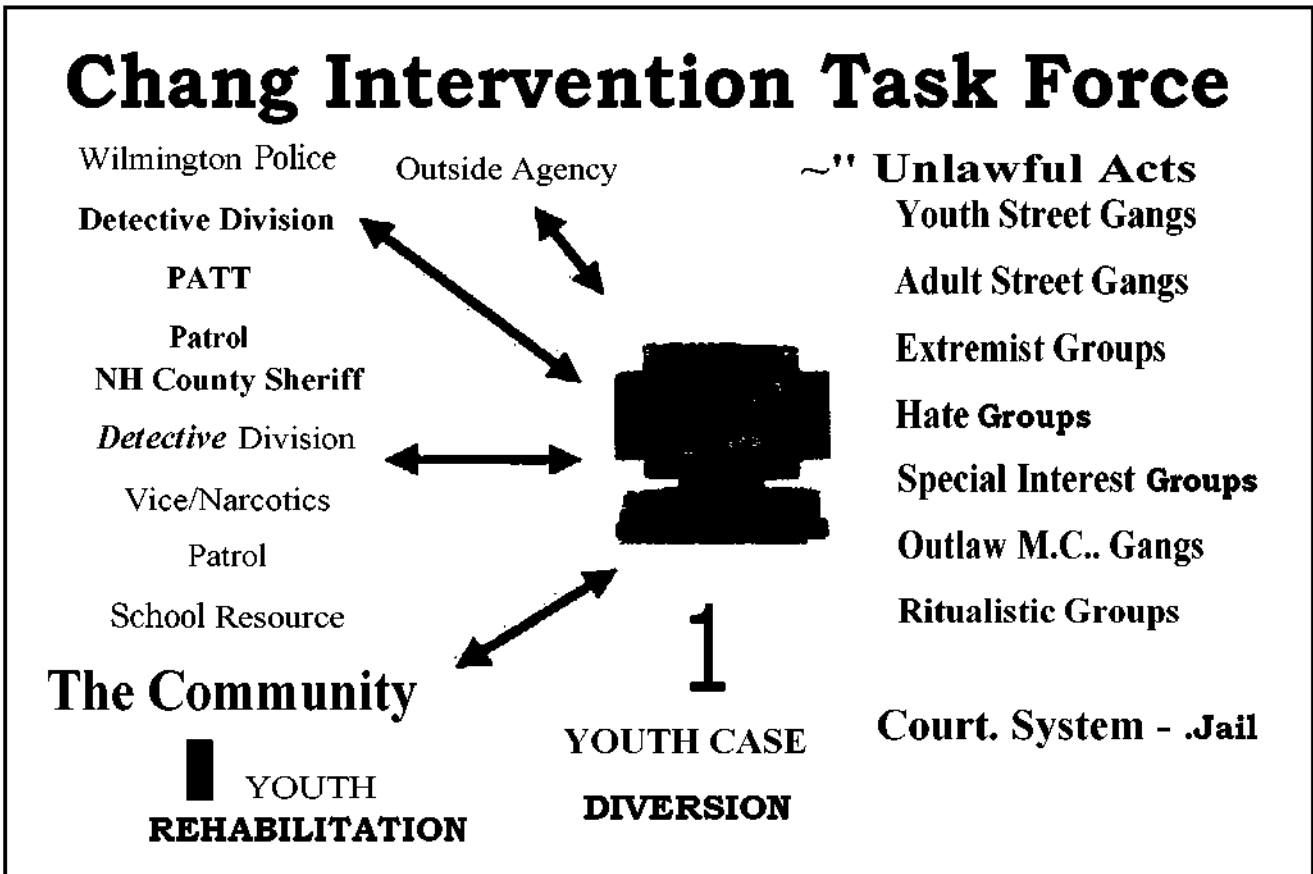
<sup>2</sup> "N.C. 5<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Juvenile Court Profile FY 1997-1998

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*The citizens,  
 The medical community,  
 Community Service agencies,  
 Community alternatives,  
 Schools,  
 Juvenile Court system.*

In addition the Social Worker and Law Enforcement personnel present Gang Awareness Training and Prevention Seminars to the medical community, schools, and other service agencies. Presentations to the medical community include information on identification of at risk youth and the local agencies that can provide intervention to the youth. Presentations to youth include awareness, identification and alternatives to gang involvement.

**Law Enforcement** applies the Community Policing philosophy, which allows Law Enforcement officers to suppress violent youth activity by patrolling community "hot spots", target, arrest and incarcerate repeat violent offenders, as well as gather and share data between all Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice agencies throughout New Hanover and other counties. The unit generally operates within the guidelines established nationally for the operation of gang suppression units. The unit also collects, evaluates, analyzes and disseminates intelligence data to support investigations of any and all person(s) and/or group(s) or organizations(s) engaged in, or reasonably believed to be engaged in illegal activities.



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**IDENTIFICATION AND CATEGORIZATION OF YOUTH PROGRAMS**

The Social Worker learns of local youth program services that may provide diversion and programs from the media, community referrals, community listings and personal knowledge of the team members. The Gang Task Force and the Program Director of the Youth Service Program meet to discuss how the two entities can collaborate to better serve the youth in the community. Programs are then evaluated and may be supported by private, public or non-profit agencies. These programs must meet the following criteria:

1. Primary focus is on the youth.
2. Participation by all the youth in attendance: not a select few who excel.
3. Fees are waived or reduced.
4. A demonstrated willingness to work with youth at risk.
5. Opportunity for youth to give back to the program.

**IDENTIFICATION AND ASSESSMENT OF YOUTH FOR PROGRAM**

**Identification:**

Through a multiple step assessment process Youth are identified as appropriate participants in the diversion program of the City-County Gang Intervention Task Force (CCGITF). The process gathers information and perspective from several sources that have been involved with the youth and the youth's family in varying roles. The assessment process includes a referral; a self-report on social, school and sexual history; an interview with the youth and a separate interview with the parents/guardian(s); a home visit; and a "staffing" where other involved professionals can disclose pertinent information regarding the family and the youth.

**Referrals:**

Referrals are received on youth that are at risk of becoming involved in gang activity; a risk factor assessment is completed. Referrals are received from the following:

1. Task Force Member
2. Other Law Enforcement Agent/Agency
3. School Personnel; to include School Resource Officer's
4. Public Agencies
5. Private Agencies
6. Family Members
7. Neighbors/Community Members

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Referrals are received by:

1. Referral Form (Appendix I)
2. Telephone Call
3. Face to Face
4. Arrest Reports, Missing Person Reports, Intelligence Submission Forms
5. Court Order

### ASSESSMENT

Assessments are completed by the Social Worker to determine if the youth is available for diversion, to insure compliance with the recommendations of the CCGITF or Court Order or a parent's consent is required (Appendix II). There are eight parts to the assessment, which **include:**

1. Face to face interview with the referred youth (to determine motivation and interests).
2. Home visit (to assess the needs of the family, the functioning of the family system and the community in which the family resides).
3. Interview with family (to determine family's commitment and family's resources).
4. Assessment form completed by the referring or objective party.
  - a. Family history
  - b. School-related problems attachment
  - c. Child -related problems attachment
  - d. Parent-related problems attachment
5. Adolescent Risk Assessment - completed by the youth (Appendix **P**).
  - a. Social history
  - b. Sexual history
  - c. School history
6. Criminal History of adult family members.
7. Interview of other professionals and agency personnel that are working with the family.
8. Team Staffing with Task Force members (to **diminish** biases).

If the **youth** is eligible for enrollment in diversion program:

1. Determine interests of the youth for program enrollment.
2. Assess youth's educational needs.
3. Meet with other professionals involved.
4. Search out an after-school **program** that *offers* the activity **identified by** the youth.
5. Discuss with the family the after-school program, the issues of fees and transportation and any concerns they may have.
6. Contact the after-school program and initiate enrollment. If space is available, complete the referral form and submit to the after-school program along with any application forms.



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If the youth is ineligible for diversion the information will be shared with Court Counselors, Probation Officers and the District Attorney to assist in prosecution. The Social Worker will identify younger members and neighborhood youth at risk, educate family and individuals about community resources and monitor activity in the neighborhood and make contact with other at-risk youth.

## **MATCHING YOUTH TO PROGRAMS**

### **A. Determining Youth's Interest:**

After the Social Worker has explained the basic premise of the diversion program the youth is asked to select an activity they would like to participate in. No limitations are initially placed on the youth's choice. Programs are placed into 5 categories:

1. Sports, Clubs, and Organizations
2. Arts (Dance, Drama, Music, Drawing/Painting)
3. Community Involvement
4. Spirituality (Self Reflection, Religion, Meditation)
5. Leisure Reading (non-school related).

### ***Options of Area Services***

Tutoring Services  
Monitored Behavior  
After School Program  
YMCA Structured Activity  
*Dreams* Art Program  
Mentor Program  
Recreational Team  
Obtaining Job Permit  
Parent Child Counseling  
Help in Seeking Employment

Once an activity has been selected, the feasibility of participating in that activity is assessed. Feasibility is based on availability, location, cost, selection criteria, youth's motivation, and family's commitment. If there is a deficit in any of the above mentioned areas, the Social Worker and the youth work to create a solution to overcome this deficit.

If the youth is having difficulty selecting an activity, the Social Worker can counsel the youth as to why they are having the difficulty making a selection. If the only apparent hindrance to making a choice is the youth's motivation and interest, the Social Worker may either elect an activity for the youth or to deem the youth inappropriate for diversion.

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### **B. Problem Solving:**

Problem solving enables the youth the opportunity to develop and improve decision-making skills. The Social Worker will educate the juvenile of available activities in the community and give the **youth** the opportunity to select an **activity**. **The increased community involvement** will foster empowerment, caring and **support** for the juvenile. The youth is encouraged by the Social Worker to formulate a case specific plan to overcome the barrier(s). Some solutions of how the barrier may be overcome can be offered by the Social Worker in an effort to get the youth started. The process of problem solving increases the juvenile's self-esteem and goal setting skills. Examples of successful solutions include:

**Transportation: ride sharing with other youth who are participating in the activity, selecting an activity near the school so the youth can walk there and will only need one-way transportation, selecting a provider** that offers transportation.

Funding: seeking **sponsorship** from a business or community member, working in the neighborhood to earn money to pay the fees, offering to provide a service to the provider in exchange for the fees, asking the service provider for a scholarship/reduced fees and/or asking several adult family members to split the cost of the fees.

Adult Support: asking the elderly community members to attend practices/performances, asking professionals in the community to share their experiences, asking citizens to become mentors.

### **C. Formal Application:**

Once it has been established that the probability of the youth participating in the selected activity is high, formal application is made to the service provider. The method of application varies dependent upon the provider. The Social Worker may choose to complete the referral for services form as an initial contact. This would allow the service provider to indicate if space is available and if they have the staff to meet the needs of the youth being referred. The youth completes the application and gathers any pertinent information needed. The application is submitted and an interview is scheduled. One of the most important reasons for scheduling an interview is to insure the youth understands the commitment he/she is making. Ideally the interview should be conducted at the program location while activities are in progress.

After the youth has been accepted into the program, it is the youth's responsibility to contact the service provider and begin the activity.

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### **D. Participating:**

The conditions and rules of participating in the program are explained to the youth. The youth acknowledges their understanding of these conditions and rules and agrees to abide by them. The Social Worker will be available to the service provider and activity manager, should an occasion arise where the youth is non-compliant. The Social Worker will assist the youth in learning appropriate behaviors that will allow continued program participation. The Social Worker will regularly monitor program participation. Contacts are documented on the evaluation form under the headings of "program attendance" and "program performance."

### **IN HOUSE PROGRAMS**

*After-school Incentive Program:* The Gang Task Force resides in a satellite station which encourages a community policing aspect, as well as, also housing a after-school program in the afternoons. The After-school Incentive Program was put into place after realizing many youth could quite possibly be deterred from violence at an early age, along with the achieving academic success. The Gang Task Force Social Worker and the Centers Coordinator implement the program. The youth involved in the program range in ages from 5-15, each week the youth bring in schoolwork and behavior reports. Each Friday the youth are allowed to pick an incentive based on their conduct and grade reports. The incentive materials consist of games, books, personalized gifts, movie/bowling passes, sporting goods, etc. A youth is never punished for below average grades, they are instead offered tutoring to improve particular grades. The Incentive Program Youth are given special outings once a month, these outings include; jail tours, visits to the park, pizza lunches, etc. This program allows youth to become closer affiliated rather than intimidated by law enforcement officials, notices the need for tutoring and offers rewards for academic achievement, and provides youth with positive role models at a critical age.

*The P.A.L. (Providing A Link) Program* was devised to provide youth with a positive role model that spends time with them on a weekly basis. The program was implemented because of the lack of sufficient and direct influences in many youths life. Volunteers are generated from local colleges, other human service agencies, and citizens. The volunteers agree to have a background check performed and must have their own transportation. The volunteer is matched with a youth and a schedule is decided between them. Volunteers may offer tutoring, recreational activities, and most important a familiar, trusting, and consistent face for the youth.

*Community Closet* is a program that enables the community to receive clothes free of cost. The Community Closet is operated on donation basis and *offers* infant, children, youth, and adult clothing both male and female. The Community Closet also offers assistance in finding proper attire to those that are looking for employment and guidance to improve interview skills. The youth involved in the After-school Incentive Program assist the staff by separating and labeling clothing donations. This program enables youth to learn appreciation and thoughtfulness while giving back to the community.

## COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

There is a collaborative effort between the Task Force and

- Juvenile Court Counselor, who conducts intensive supervision and diversion.
- The judiciary for removal of the serious chronic offenders.
- Service agencies for counseling and parenting classes.
- Medical community for data collection and services.
- The citizens by providing community service projects, mentors, and structured recreation activities.

### A. Education:

The Social Worker prepares and delivers information to youth involved in gang activity on the local and national levels to the public. The Social Worker works in conjunction with a detective of the CCGITF when presenting the information.

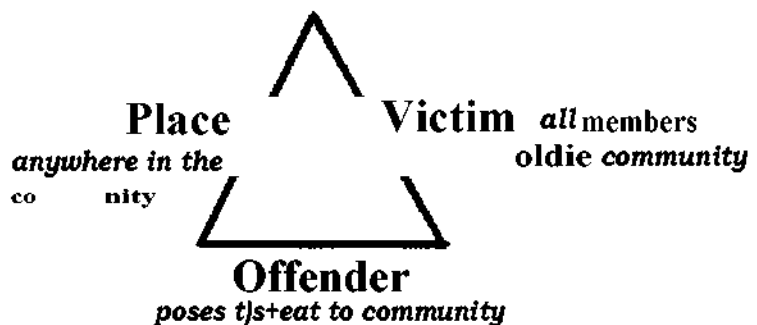
Currently, training presentations begin with basic gang awareness. As community awareness increases this segment of the training will decrease, increasing the time available to discuss ways of identifying gang activity. Once the audience is aware of the community's gang presence, identifying gang members and gang sets by the CCGITF is discussed. Identification criteria and levels of involvement are delineated. It is our intent to train others to recognize gang members and to make appropriate referrals.

The Social Worker informs the community of their available resources and provides contact information to families. The training includes a list of at risk factors and steps community members can take with their families and neighborhoods. The training briefly explains two methodological approaches used to combat gang activity: SARA and the gang problem triangle.

SARA is an acronym that stands for scanning, analyzing, responding and assessing. This is the approach used by CCGITF.

The Task Force gathers intelligence, analyzes trends, formulates a response, and assesses the results. The gang problem triangle empowers citizens by understanding their

role. All community members have the ability to set limits on all three sides of the triangle: the victim, the offender, and the place where the crime occurs. By not tolerating the acts of the offenders, by not being a victim and by setting restrictions on use of public and private property, community members can actively address gang activity. The end of the program includes a question/answer/suggestions component.



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**B. Public Relations:**

In our effort to increase public awareness of the potential for increasing gang activity, the CCGITF has designed brochures (Appendices IV & V) and manned booths at public functions. This is a great opportunity to improve the public image of Law Enforcement and serves as a prevention mechanism. Prevention is less intrusive than diversion and should be used at the earliest possible time.

**TRACKING SUCCESS**

**A. Success:**

As in the approach to interaction, success of the CCGITF is measured on two separate tracks: diversion and prosecution. Progress toward success is measured in increments. For youth enrolled in the diversion program, progress is measured at 30 days, 3 months, 6 months and at the time of termination by **documentation** on the **evaluation** form (**Appendix VI**). When the **approach** taken is prosecution, progress **toward success would be measured** at the time of trial.

1. Diversion:

Based on the entries on the evaluation form, diversion would be deemed successful if the youth showed positive growth in school functioning and in program participation and if the youth had not violated any laws (to include conditions of probation) if on probation. The evaluation form has 4 categories that are separately rated and some of the categories are rated in more than one dimension. The categories are school, employment, diversion program, and law abidance. As with any other type of rehabilitation, progress will be intermingled with regress. Failure to succeed in one category would not deem a diversion unsuccessful if the youth did not participate in that category. For example, a youth who attends school full-time, works 25 hours per week and does not violate any laws would be considered successful after a 6-month period even though he/she did not attend an activity. His non-attendance could have been attributed to conflicts with his work and school schedule.

The evaluation form can be shared with the youth as a means of reinforcing appropriate behavior and progress. If the youth is not making progress and 90 days have passed, the Social Worker may present the youth and the youth's parents with the refusal of service form (Appendix VII). This form **indicates** that the youth is not fulfilling their responsibility nor meeting their obligation and that the Social Worker has attempted to provide services that would decrease the propensity of further engagement in criminal activity and substance abuse by the youth. If either the youth or the parent refuses to sign the refusal of service form, this is duly noted at the **bottom** of the form.

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2. Prosecution:

Prosecution can be the initial course of action or it can occur after a youth has been unsuccessful in the diversion program based on new criminal charges. Either way, prosecution begins. The goal is to provide the prosecution team with as much factual information as the CCGITF has on the youth. The Social Worker may be called upon to provide information gleaned during contact with the youth. Therefore, it is important that the Social Worker explain the limits of confidentiality with the youth.

3. Progress Reports

Detectives and the Intervention Counselor complete daily logs (Appendix VIII), juvenile contact forms (Appendix IX) and field contact forms (Appendix X) on a daily basis in order to track juvenile statistics and diversions. Those statistics are then tallied to complete a monthly progress report. The progress reports also include significant dates that consist of Gang Awareness training, success stories and community awareness. The following is the tallied progress reports from July 1998 through February 2000.

Juvenile Statistics

Juvenile Contacts	2985
Adult Contacts	3487
School Visits	471
Gang Graffiti	201
Non-Gang Graffiti	271
Juvenile Arrests (16& 17)	24
Adult Arrests (18+)	<b>39</b>
Law Enforcement Presentations	241503 Attendees
Community Presentations	6213093 Attendees
Intell Submission Forms	475
Surveillance Hours	1847

**Juveniles Diverted: 48**

Referral Source	No. of Males	No. of Females	Total No.	White	Black	Hispanic
Office Juvenile Justice	12	3	14	8	5	2
Parent	2	1	3	2	1	
School	6	1	7	2	5	
Wilmington Police Department	11	4	11	14	1	
New Hanover County Sheriff's Dept.		1	1	1		
Carolina Beach Police Department	1		1	1		
South Eastern Mental Health		1	1	1		
Department of Social Services		1	1			1
Adult Probation/Parole	3	1	4	4		
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>3</b>

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## Significant Dates

- August 1999, a Gang Awareness Presentation was given to the Wilmington Apartment Association.
- September 1999, a Gang Awareness Presentation was given to Swansboro High School in Onslow County.
- October 1999, a Gang Awareness Presentation was given to Health Workers in Winston Salem, NC.
- October 1999, the Gang Task Force assisted with the preparation of a procedure manual for the Gun Recovery Training held in November.
- November 1999, the Intervention Counselor designed an outline for a new youth presentation to the Juvenile Restitution Program.
- December 1999, computerized statistics were generated on B&E Auto and Assault.
- January 2000, Intervention Counselor and Detectives conducted three gang awareness presentations to the local community.
- February 2000, Detectives conducted an investigation of gang related activity at local high schools.

## SUCCESS STORIES

At this time there is approximately 48 youth enrolled in the Diversion Program. The youth involved are receiving various diversionary methods including tutoring, recreational activities, assistance in becoming employed, returning to school, and behavior monitoring. Although the path to success takes time, as well as, effort many of the youth are on a positive track. The following two are examples of success the program has brought about.

*(The names of the youth have been changed to uphold confidentiality)*

John came to the program through a referral from the Police Department and also his parents. John, 16, had been a regular drug user and was beginning to experiment with harder substances. John had been in trouble for driving without a license and possession of drug paraphernalia. John had fallen in with a crowd whose lifestyle was centered around drugs. John, believing this new crowd to be friends, allowed them to transport him to a troubled area. It was here where John was given many unknown substances and was then beaten and left. An officer came across John and he was transported to the hospital where it was said that a few more minutes left there would have meant John's life. John denied a drug problem at first and continued to defy and argue with his parents. Some time has passed now and with much positive commitment with the diversion program, John is planning to return to school, has made new friends and rekindled relationships with friends he left behind. John is employed and giving monetary assistance to his parents. John and his parents received counseling to learn to better communicate and John has not used drugs. John has a younger sibling and was quoted as saying, "I would never want to see my sister drugged and beaten; controlled. I want to help her become the person I am now without going through what I had to."

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Paul is a 17-year-old male, who at 15 was charged with felony larceny. Paul was a known associate of gang members and was consistently truant from school. Paul learned after some time that his associates were not interested in what was best for him. After much thought and work with the diversion program, Paul decided it to be best for him to no longer associate with the gang members. It was a tough road for Paul, he was tormented for his choice, yet that subsided and he continued to move on. Paul got more involved in school activities and currently holds an office with the FBLA (Future Business Leaders of America). Paul's grades have improved so, that he has **been** on the **honor roll** the past two semesters. Paul is **currently seeking apart-time** job and is receiving assistance and information about colleges. Paul has also devoted his time to volunteer activities.