

Herman Goldstein Award Submission San Diego Police Department

Center for Problem Oriented Policing

Dear Goldstein Panel,

It is my pleasure to submit the Asian Gang project for your consideration as the Herman Goldstein Award for excellence in Problem Oriented Policing. The Asian gang project was an extraordinary effort by Gang detectives that dramatically reduced Asian gang violence. As an additional benefit the same techniques were used to bring down violent gang crime in other gangs as well.

You will see that the Asian Gang project was a unique blend of problem solving, community and intelligence led policing that when applied together led to an unprecedented reduction in homicides citywide. It is an effort all San Diego Police officers can be proud of.

Thank you for your consideration as we strive together for excellence in policing.

William Lansdowne, Chief of Police

Goldstein Award

Detective Sergeant Van Cruz, Detectives Joey Yamane, Dave Collins, Ed Valentine and Retired Detective Dan Hatfield, San Diego Police Department Gang Unit

Executive Summary

Gang shootings rocked the Asian community in an escalation that saw no end in sight. Uniformed gang enforcement fell short. Community members tried to intervene but due to the recalcitrant nature of these organized criminal groups their impact was minimal and fraught with danger. Gang detectives explored their options. Hope seemed bleak and a couple of detectives were resigned to catch cases after the fact.

The analysis showed many of the cases were 'tit for tat' retaliation shootings. Some were based on simple rumor, others personal offenses, and some legitimate retaliation shootings and younger gang members putting in work for the set. Many victims would not talk to the police, instead choosing to "handle it themselves." This resulted in a spiral of additional violent crimes.

Detectives began an effort to reduce gang crime by penetrating the gang sets with human intelligence, with the specific intent to take away guns and thus the opportunity to use them. Detectives also chose to find the most violent of the gang set - people with names like trigger- and remove them from the community. It worked. Asian gang homicides fell from 47 in 2005 to 26 in 2006. That rate shrunk again in 2007 to 18 incidents. In 2008 detectives retooled and found additional sources that forced the shootings down from 18 in 2007 to (five) 5 in 2008. This decline continued in 2009 and 2010 when there were nine and 7 firearm incidents, respectively.

Understanding the value of this problem solving effort and the intelligence value it brought, gang detectives worked with DEA and FBI counter parts to work long term projects targeting the shot callers and shooters for several powerful and violent gang sets in other demographics. In addition the area commands realized they needed to reduce the target rich environment in which these violent gangsets operated. They began curfew sweeps targeted at getting those most likely to be the victims of violent crime off of the streets. They also provided "wrap around" services at the curfew sweep focusing on public health, education and mentoring. The citywide results were spectacular.

In 2010 the 8th largest city in the nation fought crime to a standstill. There were four documented gang homicides citywide, down from 28 in 2007. That is a reduction of 86%.

Scanning

The Asian community immigrated in large numbers to San Diego in the 1970's and 80's. They are a diverse group from multiple countries including Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. There is also a sizeable population of Hmong people represented in that demographic. Older established groups such as Filipinos have a strong presence as well. As in most immigrant communities self protection groups designed for preservation turn into street gangs that victimize the communities they seek to protect.

In 2006 Gang detectives had a group of shootings and other violent acts. In calendar year 2006 there were 47 violent acts, including 36 shootings, 5 fire bombings and numerous other assaults with deadly weapons. In spite of there being 27 Asian and Pacific Islander gangs numbering more than 600 documented members, only four seemed to be the crux of the problem with Asian Crips, Tiny Oriental Crips, Oriental Killer Boys and Oriental Boy Soldiers being the most violent. They were literally at war. From working the cases and studying the incidents, it seemed most of the acts of violence were retaliation based on rumor or other acts of violence. It was a 'tit-for-tat' recycle of violence - sometimes for no good reason. All groups refused to work with the police, choosing to handle things themselves. That obviously led to additional violence.

In the past gang officers tried zero tolerance enforcement, civil injunctions, abatement of gang and drug housing, community policing such as paint-outs with neighborhood leaders and thoroughly investigating crimes with an eye for prosecution. The violence continued unabated.

Hypothesis: The problem seemed to be a recalcitrant group of gang leaders who used violent triggermen to act on their behalf. It was an inspired cycle of violence.

Analysis:

Detectives round tabled what had been tried in the past and what was lacking in their response to Asian gang crimes. Other cities were informally polled to determine what they were doing to manage gang violence. Their activities were similar to SDPD current activities. The best practices seemed to be the current practices of the gang unit. That level of failure was unacceptable.

Detectives looked at three specific dynamics about Asian gang violence.

The location, victims and suspect were examined.

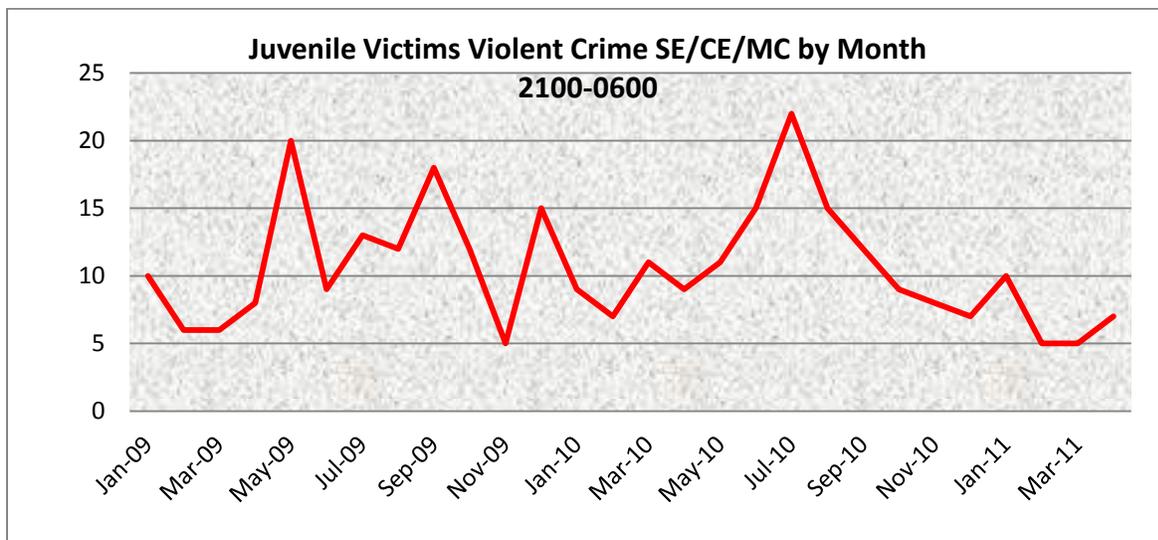
Location: When one maps Asian gang violence in the 420 square miles of the city of San Diego, Asian gang shootings are clustered in three specific areas, Mira Mesa, SE San Diego and Paradise Valley. They areas are huge and the precise locations number in the hundreds. Examining the cases, detectives learned the violence took place at personal homes, party locations, spots where the gang members congregate such as malls and stores, city streets and freeways. ***Anytime there was an unabated***

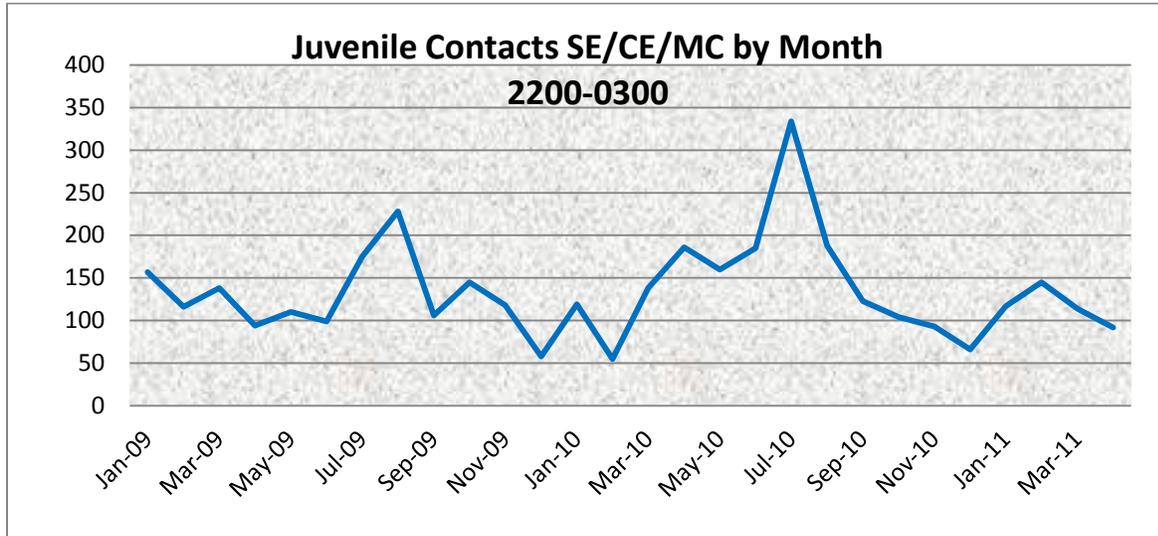
opportunity the opposing gang sets would take the shot, if armed, and the probability was high they would escape. Other times the gang operational planning was meticulous and intentional. Detectives assessed it would be very difficult to stop the violence by attacking the problem via location alone. (See attached maps)

Victims: Almost all of the victims were either documented gang members or people associating with documented gang members. While there are always exceptional cases where innocent victims are injured or killed, gangs by in large attack each other. This held true for Asian gang cases.

At one point in our analysis it showed that 25% of gang shootings citywide took place at parties where gang members were obviously present. Many of these parties were preplanned and a source of revenue for the party host and organizer. Operation Party Crasher worked to suppress these parties (all races and sets, not just Asian's) and bring an immediate but temporary stop to violence associated with the parties. As soon as calls of loud parties came in to the Communications Division, in areas where gang violence was heavy, Gang officers shut down the parties in a show of force.

While most of the victims were adults, many were juveniles. On December 29th, 2008 Taylor and Palmer were walking home from a party in SE San Diego. A car load of Crips drove by, issued a gang challenge and then shot both juveniles. Both died at the scene. A 15 year old football player with aspirations of playing in college and a 17 year old honors student, lay dead in the street. The area commands began enforcing curfew on a regular basis to remove potential targets from gang members. Instead of just picking them up and putting them into the justice system, "wrap around services" were used to mentor, console and lobby for the purpose of prevention. Groups such as Social Advocates for youth, Horizon Christian Fellowship, Inner City Youth, Probation and Child Protective Services were part of the wrap around team. The incidence of curfew violations has dropped citywide reducing the number of available targets.





Suspects: In all of the cases the suspects were documented Asian gang members or associates of the group. Due to previous convictions many were on probation or parole. Gang officers and detectives **regularly conducted probation and parole searches**. When cause existed appropriate arrests were made. **The problems continued at a high level.**

Detectives observed that rarely where the people they believed to be shot callers and triggermen involved in the actual crimes. Most (subjective) were younger and more inexperienced guys putting in work for increased status in the set. Source reporting seemed to verify this. ***The older guys, known as first generation, were telling the younger guys what to do and how to do it. The younger guys 3rd and 4th generation, were putting in the work and gaining status.***

The Gang Unit had a proactive investigative team that focused on Asian gang members for some time. They used the team to solve cases and pick the “low hanging fruit.” Where there was decent source coverage it was not focused strategically. Where the unit lacked source coverage the gang was left unattended. When the round table discussion was held within the Gang Unit, several of the detectives felt it was impossible to penetrate the gang sets with sources. ***Source recruitment was difficult because of the cultural differences.***

Another problem arose. Because of the frequent and persistent probation searches of known gang members, contraband and weapons were rarely found in their homes or places under their control. It was obvious that they had weapons but the police were unable to find them other than at random traffic stop and car search. ***Police success in seizing contraband and making arrests educated the gang***

members how to avoid detection and capture. Weapons were now stored at "Safe Houses" or locations beyond the reach of the police. Often in the homes of parents, girlfriends and gang members with no record and often excellent grades at school.

Due to their insulation from committing crimes, cleverness in hiding and storing weapons and contraband, pro-active recruitment of younger gang members and a willing victim set(s), gang violence continued.

Mira Mesa based Asian Crips seemed to be the most active group and were responsible for a great deal of the gang crimes. They were at the center of the retaliatory violence and were most adept at hiding weapons in homes where the police lacked a method of getting into the house legally.

During this timeframe a citywide Gang Commission was stood up by the office of the Mayor. This well intentioned group of civilian activists worked hard at getting into the problematic gang neighborhoods and working with community groups. When a shooting took place community members sought information as to who was likely to retaliate and take the young adults out of town. They were, however, mostly a policy group that advised the Mayor.

Hypothesis Refined: Weapon availability and leadership insulation led to an emboldened gang culture that perpetuated the retaliatory cycle of Asian gang violence.

Response:

Based on their research and analysis the Asian Gang team came up with three immediate goals and some procedural changes to enhance their ability to fight crime.

1. **Identify the 6% of gang members who where the "shot callers" and crazy ones (that is those willing to pull the trigger or order the shootings.)**
2. **Identify additional well placed informants to provide information about the inner working of the gang sets for advanced warning.**
3. **Identify where the guns were and get them off the street as soon as possible.**

Procedurally the following would occur:

1. **Have uniformed Gang officers respond to all Asian Gang incidents regardless of time of day.**
 - a. **Wall stop trained, Intelligence Collection Trained, Real time Intelligence sharing**
2. **Document all debriefs of Asian gang members and share intelligence.**
3. **Use technology to assist in investigations: Title III, Computer Hard drive exploitation and Forensic Downloader's as a routine effort.**

Stage 1: Stop the Bleeding

Gang Detectives learned who the gang leaders were and aggressively went after them. Several were arrested and the information was broadcast widely. A couple of high profile murders were also solved.

A wire intercept was initiated that resulted in a sweep of gang members. The onslaught of effort left them openly discussing how do they (the police) know so much about us.

Crime in or amongst the Asian gang sets reduced from 47 incidents to 19 the next year. Not satisfied with the results detectives retooled and continued their efforts.

Stage 2: Remove the Mechanism

Over the two year period, the number of informants skyrocketed. The Unit tripled the number of informants and more importantly the quality of the information increased. Gang detectives were able to accurately number the gang members by set, map locations, interdict at parties, document who they were, identify leaders and most importantly learn the locations of weapon cache's.

Detectives began a systematic effort to remove the guns from consideration. Several cache's were taken down and other supply chains, such as the Arizona gun shows, were blocked. One search warrant yielded 15 guns including assault rifles, another 20 guns. **As the gun supply dried up so did the violence.**

Gang Violence among Asian gang sets fell to three incidents

Stage 3: Reduce the Influence

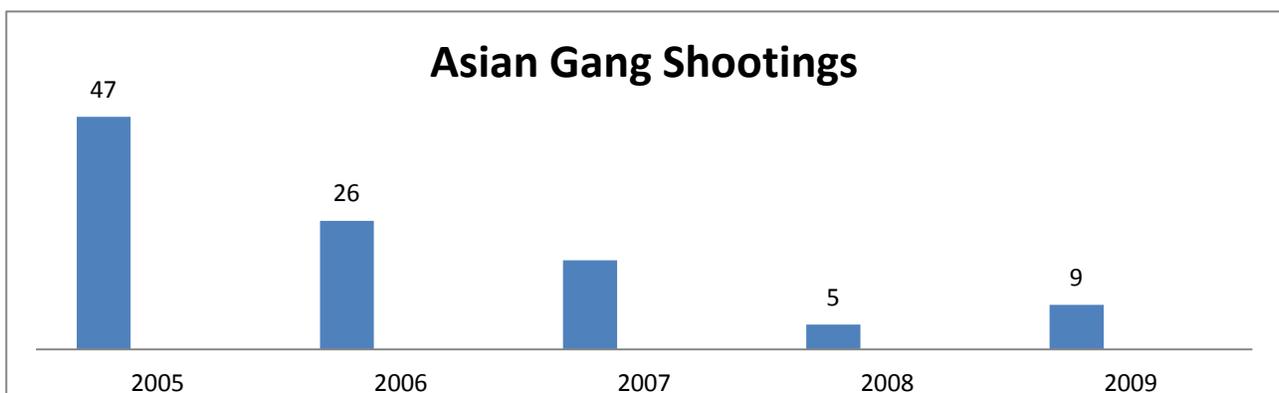
Specific focus was given to the most violent of the gang members. As they were identified operations were designed to pro-actively arrest and remove their influence from the younger more impressionable guys.

Stage 4: Cross Gang Expansion

Because of the success of the Asian project, the effort was expanded citywide to black and Hispanic gangs. Several operations targeting the most violent of the gang sets and their weapons were initiated. Story lines were created using informants and undercover personnel. Projects began one after another for two years.

Assessment:

Gang crime diminished citywide! While scores of guns were confiscated, pounds of dope were seized, numerous bodies went to jail, homicides were solved, and most importantly Gang crime fell. Asian shootings noticed a large numerical dip. After deliberate/ specific re-tooling the Asian gang crimes fell to one and two incidents a year.



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Crime Type	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Murder						
Attempt – Murder	3	0	0	0	1	0
ADW	47	18	8	3	4	6
Drive by	18	10	10	2	4	1
Crime Type	2006		2007	2008	2009	2010 (2009-2010) change
Murder	18		28	21	9	4 -56%
Attempt	11		17	16	20	5 -75%
ADW	220		256	299	225	188 -16%
Robbery	101		106	137	125	103 -18%

To be sure gang crime still flares up and surges based on events that take place in the jails and on the streets. The process of gearing up for investigations and massive takedowns continues. This is about message sending. Violence is not tolerated. Communication is vital to success.

As one detective apply stated, “It wasn’t so much that we signed up large numbers of informants, but the informants we had were well placed and able to give us their primary tool for killing. Guns.”

While the Asian gang team is highlighted for superb work, Operations continue to this day.