



**NAPA COUNTY GRAND JURY
2015-2016**

May 23, 2016

FINAL REPORT

GANG ACTIVITY IN NAPA COUNTY
The Positive Impact of Pro-Active Measures

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The Positive Impact of Pro-Active Measures

SUMMARY

An investigation was conducted by the 2015-2016 Napa County Civil Grand Jury to determine the nature and extent of gang activity in Napa County with particular emphasis on gang activity in Napa County High Schools. The investigation included interviews with law enforcement at both the County and City levels, Napa Valley Unified School District (NVUSD) administrators and principals, and staff at each of Napa County's high schools. The Grand Jury found that because of the pro-active efforts of Napa Valley law enforcement agencies, school administrators and staff, and the unique characteristics and demographics of Napa County, gang activity generally has been controlled, and overt gang activity in the high schools of Napa County has been reduced to a non-threatening level. Some Napa County high schools have no visible gang activity at all. Where school yard gang activity is present, direct and effective programs have been implemented with strong coordination between all stakeholders—law enforcement and school administrators and staff. Continued vigilance and expansion of successful programs is recommended.

BACKGROUND

The 2008-2009 Napa County Grand Jury conducted an investigation into "Napa Valley Gangs" and published a report detailing the level of gang activity at that time; measures being taken to address such activity; impact of gang activity on local schools; and recommendations for counter-acting gang activity county-wide. Since that time it does not appear that the intervening Napa County Grand Juries have considered the subject of gang activity and the extent of progress or lack thereof in controlling gangs as described by the 2008-2009 Grand Jury and, in particular, the influence of gangs in secondary schools (high schools) of the Napa Unified School District, St. Helena and Calistoga School Districts. The 2015-2016 Napa County Grand Jury undertook to determine the current level of gang activity in the county generally and its impact on Napa County high schools in particular, using the prior Grand Jury report as background and a starting foundation.

METHODOLOGY

The Grand Jury met with law enforcement officials, county school administrators, a school resource officer, high school principals and direct participants in gang diversion programs and classes. Interviews were conducted with:

- Napa County Sheriff's Department
- City of Napa Police Department
- Napa County Unified School District
- Vintage High School
- American Canyon High School
- Napa High School

- St. Helena High School
- Valley Oaks High School
- Calistoga Senior High School

Vintage, American Canyon, Napa and Valley Oaks high schools are all part of the NVUSD.

DISCUSSION

As detailed below, since the 2008-2009 Report, several measures have been taken in the community at large as well as in particular schools that are most vulnerable to gang activity. Those efforts have largely been successful and should be commended and continued. Gang activity has been addressed both by law enforcement agencies and in coordination with local high schools.

There are two major gangs in Napa County—the Nortenos and the Surenos, i.e., the "Northerners" and the "Southerners." (See the 2008-2009 Report for a historical discussion on the origin of these two groups, their affiliations, markings, language, etc.). It is estimated that there are between 50 and 105 adult members from each group active in Napa County at any given time. (Approximately 100 to 200 individuals in total). During 2015, there were 205 police calls in Napa County relating to gang activity, with 76 actual arrests resulting in 12 convictions for adult gang activity. Many, but not all, of Napa County's high schools have individuals belonging to both gangs. In particular, it is estimated that approximately 20 to 30 individuals each at Vintage High School and Napa High School campuses affiliate with each of the two main gangs (i.e., 40 to 60 total gang members per campus).

According to school administrators and senior law enforcement personnel, the level of gang activity in Napa County has declined in both numbers of incidents and seriousness since the 2008-2009 report. As for high schools in particular, every Napa County high school is different. Gang activity is non-existent at some Napa County high schools. Where gang activity is present today, it takes more the form of a social affiliation than a criminal enterprise. School administrators and law enforcement agencies are using varied but different approaches to keep gangs in check. Where gang activity poses a clear and present risk, effective measures are being taken on individual high school campuses to directly engage the gang participants and to draw them away from gangs and toward community acceptable behavior. As second generation Hispanic students become more integrated into the Napa community and schools and as their numbers continue to increase to fifty percent or more (50%) of the school-aged population, there is less reliance on gang membership for personal identity, social interaction, and "protection."

The high school officials whom the Jury interviewed concurred that today gang violence on high school campuses is rare. Use of firearms and weapons on school campuses is very rare, and expulsion from Napa County high schools for gang related activities is non-existent. This has not just occurred by chance. The efforts described below have been calculated, concentrated, continuous, and pursued relentlessly by dedicated individuals who have their students' futures first and foremost in mind.

Moreover, Napa County benefits from certain road geographic limitations which, when exploited by law enforcement, are strong deterrents to gang activity in the County. There is one major roadway leading into and out of Napa County and no quick direct connection with any interstate highway. This limits the ability of a perpetrator to make a quick escape from Napa County, and it gives law enforcement a "bottle neck" in which the perpetrator is likely to be ensnared and apprehended.

In addition, the City of Napa Police Department has proactively placed School Resource Officers (SROs) on some NVUSD campuses. These are regular service police officers who have an interest in facilitating relationships with students and in providing direct security for campuses. There is a full-time SRO at Vintage High School, and Napa High School and Valley Oaks High School share an SRO. SROs can be very effective in enhancing relations between law enforcement and the community. The SRO at Vintage High School, for example, is very involved with the Legacy Program there and interacts extensively with students.

High school officials also mentioned that effective integration into the school curriculum is another effective measure against gang activity. All Napa County schools endeavor to "keep the students busy and engaged" in a relevant and interesting curriculum, including in some instances hands-on shop classes, music classes, heritage classes, and cutting-edge technology classes. All Napa County high schools strongly encourage students to continue their education after high school.

Finally, and of at least as much importance, school administrators informed the Jury that families of gang members and candidates are active in their children's education and willing to meet with school and community representatives in a continuing effort to counter gang influences. School outreach programs have been successful in encouraging families to be involved in their children's education.

Law enforcement cautioned the Jury not to assume that Napa County is "gang free;" it is not. Influence from surrounding counties where gang activity is more serious is a threat. It is unlikely that gangs will ever be entirely eliminated from Napa County. However, successful integration, together with active and effective intervention, is the best answer to preventing gang growth.

School administrators and law enforcement officials agree that gangs primarily target young men from Hispanic families. Most of these gang members and families recently emigrated from Mexico, may or may not be legal residents, and have no heritage or personal stake in Napa County or California. As such, they are adrift from familial bonds and find themselves in a minority position in a foreign community. Gangs offer that missing link through compatriots similarly situated who pledge loyalty and support for each other and for the group as a whole. The individuals no longer need be alone; and, as part of the gang, they enjoy companionship, security, respect and, in some instances, financial support. It has long been the goal of Napa law enforcement and school administrators to break this repeating pattern by showing young Hispanics that they can succeed in Napa County and elsewhere. Education is a centerpiece of this

effort—as young Hispanic gang members or candidates for gang membership are attracted away from gangs and toward educational opportunities, the significance and threat of gangs has and will continue to diminish accordingly.

School administrators and staff recognize that the younger the age at which prospective gang members are dissuaded from engaging in gang activity the better. From school expulsion to a criminal record, law enforcement and school administrators recognize that a single violent gang incident can brand an individual for life and make it virtually impossible for him or her to realize a successful and fulfilling future. Disciplinary experience shows that high school age students are prime candidates for joining and participating in gangs. Left unchecked, high school age gang members are at risk for destroying their ability to pursue higher education and aspire to better jobs and an overall better life. One focus of this investigation was to insure everything that reasonably can be done to identify gang at-risk individuals in Napa County high schools and to attract them away from gang life is being done.

Law Enforcement: Napa County and Napa City law enforcement officials are aware of the potential for gang activity and have taken, and continue to take, consistent actions in response. Based upon self-declared status following arrests, it is believed that there are approximately 100 to 200 actual adult gang members active in Napa County—primarily in and around the City of Napa. There is close coordination between the Napa County Sheriff, the Napa City Police Department, the Napa County District Attorney's Office, and many other stakeholders. A Gang and Youth Task Force meets five times during the year explicitly for the purpose of monitoring, preventing, and counter-acting gang activity in the County. The Gang and Youth Task Force meetings are public, but the level of public attendance is not high.

Approach of NVUSD: Gang members who caused problems in Napa high schools and other malcontents used to be summarily suspended or expelled. That approach did not work well. If anything, it gave more time to actual and potential gang members to engage in mischief. Today very few students are suspended or expelled from the NVUSD. During 2015, for example, only one student was expelled. The goal today of the NVUSD is to keep all students in a mainline high school or a "special" high school that can provide more individual attention for conduct and academics. Students referred for conduct or grossly deficient academics may return to their regular schools at the student's option after demonstrating their ability to perform adequately and appropriately.

Individual case studies:

Vintage High School

With over 2400 students (student to teacher ratio of 22:1), 55% of whom are Hispanic, Vintage High has seen gang violence on campus in the not too distant past. A large fight on campus approximately eight years ago vividly revealed that something needed to be done at Vintage High to protect students and faculty and to safeguard the school's learning environment. (Today there

are as many as 60 students who affiliate with one gang or another). To that end, the Legacy Program was established at Vintage High by the SRO and a teacher/administrator with strong support from the administration. The Legacy Program has been very successful.

Initially, the Legacy Program was intended to deal with identified "problem" gang members. Certain students were told that they "would be attending" the Legacy Program. Attendance was mandatory but without academic credit. That has changed. Today the Legacy Class is a voluntary part of the Vintage High curriculum, in which attendees receive academic credit. It is open to both men and women and it is typically over-subscribed. In many respects, the Legacy Program is an identity exploration for those searching to belong. The approach of the Legacy Program is to educate students on their own Hispanic heritage—where they came from geographically and socially. Students "discover" their heritage and create pride and respect for themselves and others. Individual grades of Legacy students generally improve, and students are encouraged to pursue their education beyond high school at either two or four year colleges. Actual and prospective gang members have been redirected from destructive activities and attitudes to productive efforts. The Legacy Program has been a salvation to many students who otherwise would have been left behind academically, with no self-respect and a criminal future. Eighty percent of Legacy students improve their grades overall. Fifty-five percent improve their grades by a full grade point or more. All Legacy students graduate. Recently, the Legacy Program has been expanded into Silverado Middle School, but it has not been expanded to other Napa County high schools. The greatest impediment to expanding the Legacy Program is funding.

Other high schools rely on the AVID Program. The AVID program (Advancement Via Individual Determination) is directed at first generation English speakers whose parents did not attend high school. The AVID Program provides individualized oversight and academic help for these students. The AVID Program has also been successful in advancing the academic growth of students at risk because of deficient language skills.

Napa High School

With over 1800 students (student to teacher ratio of 23:1), 50% of Hispanic backgrounds, Napa High is keenly aware of Hispanic gangs and their potential to adversely impact the academic and social goals of the school. There are approximately 40 to 60 total gang members at Napa High. Napa High relies on its AVID program to provide needed additional attention to language deficient students—many of whom are at greatest risk for gang activities. Napa High staff are active in the Gang Task Force, as are staff from the other high schools; and Napa High administrators vigilantly monitor the number and activities of gang members on and off the Napa High School campus. Napa High does not offer the Legacy Program.

American Canyon High School

The student body of the newest high school in the NVUSD is comprised of 1500 students (student to teacher ratio of 24:1) including a relatively small proportion of Hispanics (30%) by

comparison to Vintage and Napa high schools. American Canyon High School has a very strict dress code that prohibits the wearing of head coverings and gang affiliation colors. The only time that gang activity impacts American Canyon High School is when students from other schools, primarily those in Vallejo, visit the American Canyon High School campus. Usually those unauthorized students are readily identified because they are wearing head gear or gang colors in which case they are told to leave the campus. American Canyon High School does not offer the Legacy Program; but it does support the AVID Program for second language students needing additional attention.

Valley Oak High School

Valley Oak High School has a student body of 150 students (student to teacher ratio of 20:1) with 73% Hispanic and a high proportion of males. Whenever it becomes apparent at either Napa High or Vintage High that a student is too deficient in his or her academic progress to graduate on time, that student will be transferred to Valley Oak. There the student will receive direct attention and counseling designed to accelerate the student's academic growth. Some of the referred students are gang members, and there is a gang presence at Valley Oak. The low student to teacher ratio and Hispanic staff presence at Valley Oak appears to mitigate the risk of disruptive or dangerous gang activity. Valley Oak does not offer the Legacy Program but it does offer and use the AVID Program.

St. Helena High School

Although not part of the NVUSD, the Grand Jury members felt it important to investigate the impact of gangs "up valley." St. Helena High has approximately 485 students (student to teacher ratio of 16:1), of which 50% are Hispanic. The administration of St. Helena High is very diligent at prevention. For example, all students attending school sponsored social events, like dances, are required to take a breathalyzer test upon arrival at the event. Chaperones are present and visible at all social events. In addition, drug sniffing dogs visit St. Helena High School several times during the year to walk the locker and common areas. As a result, St. Helena High has not experienced significant gang activity. One student was expelled last year for vandalism that was not gang related.

Calistoga Senior High School

Calistoga High School has 240 students (student to teacher ratio of 16:1). It has the largest percentage of Hispanic students in the county (about 90 percent) and the least evidence of gang activity. The low student to teacher ratio and high expenditures per student, which are the highest in the County, allow Calistoga High School to attract excellent teachers. Calistoga High School has the benefit of an broad, modern curriculum, including an extensive AVID Program, supported by state-of-the-art facilities and creative classes to engage students and prepare them to continue their education. Most students come from low income homes—they also work after school, thereby limiting free-time hours. Families do participate in the education process at Calistoga

High School as a result of a conscious outreach program that has created strong peer-pressure to participate.

FINDINGS

Based upon the foregoing, we make the following findings:

- F1:** Efforts of law enforcement to address gang activity in Napa County have been successful in limiting its impact.
- F2:** Efforts of administrators and staff at NVUSD and at St. Helena High School to address gang activity on high school campuses have been successful in limiting its impact.
- F3:** Significant gang activity remains in Napa County generally and in Vintage High School, Valley Oaks High School and Napa High School.
- F4:** Gang Activity on the campuses of Vintage High School, Valley Oaks High School and Napa High School is more akin to social affiliation than a violent organization or criminal enterprise.
- F5:** Efforts at Vintage High School with the Legacy Program have been particularly successful in attracting gang members and potential gang members and in dissuading them from following a gang lifestyle. However, the success of the Legacy Program is limited to Vintage High School and likely due to the individuals involved in establishing and running the Program there.
- F6:** Napa High School is nearest to Vintage High School on a demographic analysis.
- F7:** It is uncertain whether the Legacy Program could be effectively established at other campuses.
- F8:** Gang activity is not a present danger at American Canyon High School.
- F9:** Gang Activity is not a present danger at St. Helena High School.
- F10:** Gang activity is not a present danger at Calistoga High School.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- R1:** Continue and expand the use of SROs at all Napa County public high school campuses.
- R2:** Continue the Legacy Program at Vintage High School and use as a model for other high schools, in particular Napa High School and Valley Oak High School.

REQUEST FOR RESPONSES

Pursuant to Penal Code section 933.05, the Grand Jury requests responses as follows: From the following governing body:

Napa Valley Unified School District Board of Education: **F7, R2**

From the following individual:

Napa Valley Unified School District Superintendent: **F7, R2**

DISCLAIMER

Reports issued by the Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Penal Code section 929 requires that reports of the Grand Jury not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Grand Jury.