

Gang task force looks for broader reach

By Paul Burgarino
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PITTSBURG — About two dozen representatives from the law enforcement, health care, faith-based and youth-services sectors met Monday morning to discuss how they can work more effectively to curtail gang activity in East County suburbs.

The task force meeting was a follow-up to last year's East County Gang Summit, with a goal of bringing community resources together to deter teenagers — particularly younger teens — from gang involvement.

Data presented by John Muir Medical Center's Trauma Services showed an increase in cases of penetrating injuries from 2005 to 2007, particularly from gunshots. That information also showed a disproportionate number of injuries among African-Americans and Latinos compared with the overall population.

Though it's not a clear indicator because the injury database is relatively small, the information does support the likelihood of an increase in gang violence, said Kasey Hansen, director of trauma services.

Most of the meeting touched on the gang-intervention efforts of various grass-roots organizations in East County.

Johnny Rodriguez, director of Brentwood-based One Day At a Time, said treating kids with respect and understanding, while involving them in programs and work experience, can make a difference. Antioch's Youth Intervention Network and Pittsburg's Stray Bullets program also seek to provide options for potential gang members.

By pooling resources, "we can be as structured and as organized as any gang," Rodriguez said.

However, some acknowledged the process won't be easy.

Following the hour-long discussion about the task force's goals, Supervisor Federal Glover said he would try to seek funding for a planning grant. A meeting will be held in mid-November for further discussion.

An inventory of available resources will also be prepared before that meeting.

"It's time to put pen to paper, and put the words into action," Glover said, adding the effort had been volunteer-driven but now needed total commitment on the part of some.

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