

[print](#)

Gang Summit puts focus on families

by Justin Lafferty

10.14.10 - 10:58 am



Had proper structure reached Gaby Rodriguez earlier, the Deer Valley High School junior's story might be different.

Rodriguez was on a panel of former gang members who spoke at Saturday's East County Gang Summit, organized by Contra Costa County District 5 Supervisor Federal Glover and held on Rodriguez's campus.

She moved from Nicaragua to the United States at the age of 7 and got involved in gangs shortly thereafter because it was what her cousins and friends were doing. She thought it was the norm.

Rodriguez started dissociating with gangs at age 13 because she just got tired of the lifestyle. She credited the East County-based nonprofit One Day at a Time, which also held presentations at the summit, for helping her turn things around. Her grades have improved since she escaped from gang life.

"I was so young, but then I had so many little kids that would look up to me," Rodriguez said. "I didn't want them to go through the same thing."

The summit focused on early prevention and better relations between parents, guardians and their children. At the day-long event, police officers and people from local nonprofits stressed the importance of families taking an active role in children's lives, and students making good decisions.

That morning in the theater, Antioch police officers directed Gangs 101, which educated parents, teens and other members of the community about gang colors, affiliations and other warning signs.

East County officers expressed a desire to work with other agencies to prevent gangs from becoming as much of a problem as other parts of the Bay Area. Antioch police Lt. Robin Kelley said there were 166 gang-related incidents in the city last year and 120 so far this year. According to Pittsburg police Lt. Brian Addington, his city saw one gang-related homicide in 2006, two in 2007, none in 2008, two in 2009 and one so far in 2010.

"An important thing is to network the different resources in the community together on different endeavors, and one of them is gang awareness and gang

prevention,” said Antioch police chief Jim Hyde. “When there’s less jobs for kids, there’s less hope, so they turn to other things that provide them with recognition – albeit bad recognition. Kids flourish in structure. The problem is: gangs provide structure.”

In another seminar, parents received tips on how to spot children’s involvement in risky behavior. Antioch resident Robert Hurtado, who spent some time in gangs and in and out of jail, felt that the message of the summit was spot-on. Hurtado is trying prevent his children from making the same mistakes he did.

Local nonprofit organizations such as the Pittsburg-based People Who Care focused on helping young people make better decisions. Members of PWC performed a mock group setting, where students were given tough situations – such as a confrontation with relatives or friends – and asked to come up with a peaceful solution.

“Everybody coming together and reaching out to others to help make the right decision – that really helps,” said Tyrell Burks, a senior at Pittsburg High and a member of PWC

Glover was pleased with the event, which attracted a couple hundred parents, teens and other members of the community. He last organized a summit in Pittsburg in 2007, but that was more informational.

“I think that was a good first step,” said Glover, “and this will give an opportunity for the community as a whole, regardless of where they come from (to know) that everyone’s together, and enter into a dialogue.”

© thepress.net 2010