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Anti-gang summit stresses importance of family, community

By Paul Burgarino
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ANTIOCH -- It may take a village to raise children, but it also takes strong family intervention to keep them from the lure of gang activity.

That message, along with the need for local groups to work together in providing resources for troubled youngsters, was a common theme during Saturday's East County Gang Summit.

The free daylong event at Deer Valley High School was hosted by Contra Costa Supervisor Federal Glover, the East County Gang Task Force and other community groups.

Gang activity often associated with urban areas has become a growing concern in the eastern part of Contra Costa County.

Parents can steer their children from gangs by monitoring their belongings, knowing where they are, meeting their children's friends and parents, and simply talking with their children, Antioch police Detective James Stenger said.

"Parents have to be the intervention. It has to start at home," said Iris Archuleta, founder of Antioch

nonprofit Youth Intervention Network, which helps at-risk youths and their families work out problems.

Former gang member Sonia Tafoya agrees.

Tafoya, one of seven who sat on a gang panel discussing their tribulations in the fast life, took part in the gang lifestyle before choosing to get out for her children.

"The people I was around, close friends, started dying," she said.

When asked about ways to deter kids from gangs, Tafoya said: "Time. Spending time with your kid."

Roughly

200 youths, parents, educators, youth service providers, police officers and civic leaders gathered to combat the ongoing issue of gangs in the growing region.

Antioch parent Lisa Rivera attended the summit because of concerns about school safety. There is a need for more involvement among parents and police resources to prevent fights and violence, she said.

Stenger hosted a workshop called "Local Gangs: 101," which laid out the various local street gangs police have identified.

Gang indicators include wearing certain colors, identifying with certain numbers, tattoos, graffiti on walls or textbooks, even wearing rosary beads of a certain color.

Police are "always behind the curve on what's going on" in gangs, Stenger said. By the time arrests start to be made, a gang could have been active for 6 to 12 months, he said.



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The information given was "pretty much on point," said Ricky Quevedo, 17. Quevedo was shot during a gang-related argument outside Deer Valley High in September 2009. Quevedo said he was shot after trying to "take fight" with a rival gang member.

Since then, Quevedo has gotten out of that lifestyle and "mainly tried to better himself" and aspires to be a longshoreman, he said.

Saturday's summit allowed local service groups to show what resources are available.

Veronica Pope, head of Pittsburg nonprofit agency People Who Care, said the summit provided youths and parents insight into what the organization does, including seeing how an anger management session works.

"For some of the youth to be exposed to the workshops and see what's out there was very strong," said Johnny Rodriguez, director of Brentwood-based nonprofit agency One Day At A Time, which works to steer at-risk youths in Antioch away from violence and academic problems.

Work must be done to connect the different resources in the education, faith and nonprofit realm and create a plan, Glover said. Pope said she traded a lot of resources with other agencies and vice versa.

"If we work collectively, we can have a higher impact," Rodriguez said. "It can be done."

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