

Gang Violence in San Antonio

Juvenile gang crime and violence began in late 1988 with about 150 juveniles located primarily in the downtown area of the city. They were called the "town freaks" and their activity included hanging out downtown, drinking alcohol, smoking pot and breaking into cars.

During 1992-1995, San Antonio became one of the top 5 cities for gang activity. There was an average of 20-25 drive-by shootings per month according to San Antonio news reporting agencies. Gang violence decreased during 1996-2000 due to state, city and local community preparation for release of juvenile offenders from the criminal justice system. Funding in the amount of \$5M per year was provided for counseling, job training, and other social programs geared toward re-acclimation into society.

Juvenile crime has been on the rise in the past 2 years. Approximately 80% of crimes committed in S.A. have been linked to juvenile perpetrators. One of the main reasons for the increase in crime is the lack of involvement at state, city, county government and local law enforcement. There has been at least a \$3M cut in funding by the current administration which has contributed to the unacceptable behavior of the juveniles in our communities. The lack of programs to help our youth maintain jobs, to encourage them to continue their education has resulted in more homicides, burglaries, robberies and home invasions in our community. There are over 20,000 juveniles in our judicial system, of which 60% are responsible for the violence in our communities in the year 2008. There has been at least 70% cut in gang prevention and intervention funds in the last 2 years according to local media. It is also impossible to eliminate recidivism rate without local and state government and law enforcement. The lack of funds has a tremendous impact on the SA community involving juvenile crime. There must be programs designed to encourage our youth to be productive in society providing job skills and more educational programs designed for drop-outs.

The communities themselves must step out and demand that the state and local governments get involved in curtailing the juvenile violence in our city. One of the first ways to determine juvenile violence and activity is the presence of graffiti, vagrancy, and attire worn by juvenile on a daily basis. There are other indicators as follows: truancy, substance abuse, alcoholism, loud music and parties. If there is an increase of juvenile activity, then we must build a communication system among the communities, local law enforcement and local state agencies to curtail the violence. We must involve the media, city council, commissioners, and business organizations to develop this communication system. One of the most effective ways of communicating is Cellular on Patrol (COP). You can contact AT&T to receive cellular phones and designate block captains in the neighborhood who will be on watch for any offensive behavior by juveniles.

We must look out for gang initiation and activity. We must not be afraid but be aware in order to stop the violence utilizing communication systems available in the community. Parents must take an active role with their own youth to discourage gang involvement thereby helping to keep our communities safe to live in and to raise our families.

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