



Partners In Crime Prevention

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John Lovick Sheriff

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MS13

Graffiti advertising the Mara Salvatrucha gang

Gangs– Prevention From All Angles

The beating and stabbing death of a teen in Sultan by five other teens on June 17, 2009 has highlighted the concern about gang activity within the Sheriff's Office and within the community at large.

Police agencies in Snohomish County have documented 52 gangs with as many as 1,200 members.

The gangs represent the beginning of a cycle of growth in gangs that has been seen in other parts of the country. This cycle includes the first gang becoming organized. Then they become entrenched in schools and communities. New gangs form to provide "protection" for their group against other gangs. Frequently, gangs are territorial and vigorously defend territory that they have staked out for themselves.

Currently, street gangs in Snohomish County are not territorial and are transient. Local law enforcement officials fear that if they do not interrupt this cycle then gang activity will rapidly grow out of control. Gangs will become stronger, more territorial and neighborhood based. Criminal activity will grow with increased illicit drug sales (a common way for gangs to "earn" money) and the increase of more violent crimes of intimidation, assaults, and shooting in residential areas as gangs try to expand their territories and at the same time protect their territories.

For the third summer the Sheriff's Office and other police agencies in the county are using school resource officers to focus on gangs with enforcement actions and intervention. With a lean budget, the Sheriff's Office cannot afford a full fledged gang unit. Utilizing school resource officers makes sense given that gangs often recruit teens in high schools and middle schools. School resource officers are in a strategic position to hear about gang activity and to try to steer potential gang members away from that life style, disrupt the hard core gang members in their criminal activity, and hopefully break the cycle that leads to widespread gang activity.

Local law enforcement officials have learned from communities that have widespread gang activity that a police only response of "suppression" hardens gang members into an "us versus them" mentality taking away the police's ability to reduce gang criminal activity.

As a result, the Sheriff's Office, along with other police agencies in the county are trying to take a more comprehensive approach that includes various groups in our community such as social service organizations, schools, churches, etc. They hope that this approach will keep young people engaged in positive activities, prevent kids from joining gangs, and remove members from the gang lifestyle.

What Parents Can Do

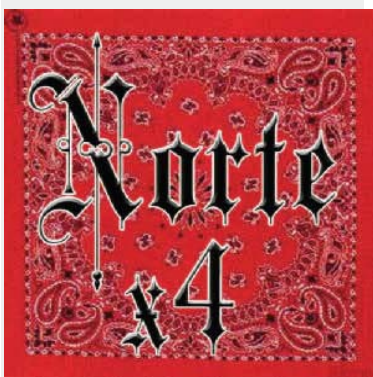
Tell your children not to:

- Associate with gang members.
- Hang out where gangs congregate.
- Attend parties sponsored by gangs.
- Use hand or finger signs that are meaningful to gangs.
- Wear clothing that has meaning to gangs.

Get to know your children's friends and their parents.

Talk to your children about ways to deal with pressure from their friends.

Plan family time with your kids.



The colors and symbols of the Norteños gang

Gangs— Signs of Activity

Early adolescence (12-14 years old) are prime years for children to become exposed to gangs and consider joining a gang. Your child may have become involved in a gang if you see:

- A negative change in behavior.
- Unusual interest in one or two particular colors of clothing or a particular logo.
- Interest in gang-influenced music, videos and movies.
- Use and practice of hand signals to communicate with friends.
- Peculiar drawings or gang symbols on schoolbooks, clothing, notebooks, or walls.
- Drastic changes in hair or dress style.
- Withdrawal from longtime friends.
- Suspected drug or alcohol use.
- The presence of firearms or knives.
- Non-accidental physical injuries from being beaten or from fighting.
- Unexplained cash or goods.

Gangs frequently display their identity with clothing, colors, symbols, tattoos, hand signs, and graffiti.

Clothing— Gang members use clothing to show membership in a gang. This can include bandanas with colors that the gang has adopted, such as blue and white for MS-13 or blue for the Crips and red for the Bloods. They may wear their pants well below their waist (called sagging). They may also wear gang themed T shirts, bead necklaces, colored fabric belts and sometimes belt buckles with the initials or sign of the gang.

Sometimes gang members will wear certain colors, numbers or brands. They may also refuse to wear certain colors.

Symbols— Gangs often display symbols and numbers that have special meaning to them. For example, the Sureños identify with the number “13” (also displayed as “XIII”, “X3”) and the letter “M” the thirteenth letter of the alphabet. The Norteños identify with the number “14”. Symbols can include 5 or 6 pointed stars, pitchforks (the Black Gangster Disciples use a 6 pointed star and pitchforks), and 3 dots in a triangle (the Sureños).

Tattoos— Gang members will have tattoos placed on their hands, neck, face, chest or arms as a visible demonstration of their loyalty to their gang. The tattoos can show the gang's name, initials or symbols.

Hand signs— Hand signs are used to communicate a gang member's affiliation with a gang or threaten and challenge a rival gang.

Graffiti— Gangs use graffiti to mark territory, mourn fallen members, and threaten rivals. Gang graffiti will display the symbols of the gang and tend not to be artful like a tagger's graffiti. Removing graffiti quickly is important in preventing a gang from taking hold in a community. Look for youths with spray paint, spray paint plastic tips, or wide-tipped markers.



G– CRT– A Community Response

The Sheriff's Office's efforts have been to try to prevent gang activity from spreading and becoming the big problem that it is in parts of Los Angeles or Chicago.

Modern police organizations, including the Sheriff's Office, have been looking to outside social service and community organizations to help curb the growth of gangs. In the fall of 2008 the Sheriff's Office started organizing the Gang Community Response Team (G-CRT). This is a wide ranging group that includes teachers, community outreach workers, law enforcement officers, juvenile justice and rehabilitation professionals, librarians, social service providers, parents, and many other groups.

The idea is to get away from using the "suppression" of gang activity as the only method of reducing gang related crime. By also involving and coordinating with a variety of social service professionals, local government can try to keep vulnerable kids out of gangs; or move those kids who have become gang members out of the gang lifestyle. For those gang members who remain hardcore and/or commit felonies in their gang life, police will catch them and prosecutors will prosecute them.

G-CRT concentrates on 5 broad areas:

1. Data collection and analysis
2. Community awareness and education

3. School based prevention and intervention
4. Multi-disciplinary intervention team development
5. Suppression

The participants in G-CRT are attempting to coordinate and collaborate in their efforts. Gangs thrive in disorganized communities. By launching an organized effort, many stakeholders can concentrate on their specialties to contribute to a common goal of breaking the cycle of gang growth early in our county.

This effort will take many people to be involved in big and small ways. If you think that you would like to help or if you have questions about G-CRT, contact Ann Plunkett the Sheriff's Office's Director of Community Partnerships:

Phone: (425) 388-3253

Email: ann.plunkett@snoco.org



We Value Kids

For more information about gangs go to The Snohomish County Children's Commission web site's section on gangs-

<http://www.wevaluekids.org/gangs>

Gang Tip Line

If you have any information about gang activity in Snohomish County you can call the following number to report it:

425-388-6666



Gangs– Keeping Kids Out

The major motivation for kids to join a gang is that the gang gives a stronger sense of belonging than the family or any other social group does. This sense of belonging becomes strong enough to elicit the criminal activity that frequently is the requirement for gang membership.

The key to preventing kids from joining a gang is having people involved with their lives. That can be parents, school teachers, church members, and friends. What is important is that the people around the child are the people who provide positive influences, and presumably law abiding influences.

The Search Institute (www.search-institute.org) has developed an approach that is called an Asset Approach to raising children. This approach lists 40 external and internal developmental assets that protects youths between the ages of 12 to 18 years old from alcohol use, illicit drug use, sexual activity and violence.

The assets protect youth from risky behavior and are divided in the following major areas:

- Providing support to the youth.
- Empowering youth.
- Providing boundaries and expectations.
- Ensuring a constructive use of time.

- Encouraging a commitment to learning.
- Developing positive values.
- Improving social competencies.
- Developing a positive identity.

The Search Institute is a nonprofit organization that promotes the well-being of adolescents and children by educating parents and communities and by conducting research on youth. For more information go to www.search-institute.org.

Cocoon House

Much of the success in keeping out of gangs comes with the involvement of parents. Parents with kids who are attracted to the gang lifestyle may become overwhelmed with what they think is an overwhelming task. Or they may feel that they do not have the skills to keep their child out of gangs, or to get them out of a gang.

Cocoon House may be of assistance. While its main objective is to keep youth 13 and 21 off the streets, it does have programs to help parents and their teen children to build communication skills and strengthen their relationships.

For more information call: (800) 259-6042 or on the web:

www.cocoonhouse.org/

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1-800-
CRIME-13

Tip Lines:

Phone:

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Sheriff's Website:

www.co.snohomish.wa.us/SheriffRpts/AnonymousTips/default.htm

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