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SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION TO A NEW SOCIETY IN THE CITY OF SANTA BARBARA, CALIFORNIA, USA, USING COMMUNITY COOPERATION-COLLABORATION

Abstract: Objective: reduction in gang violence and incidents, and transition to new, peaceful society. Problem: Santa Barbara is a city of 90,000, in California. In 1995, it had eight gangs, with 350 members, and 223 gang-related incidents, including murders. Response: Common purposeful resolution and prevention of violence: by 1) Creation of multi-agency Pro-Youth Coalition, (PYC), 2) Collaborative research, understanding and resolution of social and system causes of violence for Community, 3) For Individual Gang Members, 4) For Families, and 5) For School Children. Result: by 1999: reduction of gang violence incidents to 15: by 93%.

Key words: *Collaboration of Everybody in City: Community. Agencies. Systems. Gang-Members. Families. School Children. Understanding. Societal Causes-Systems. Common Purpose and Persistent Evolving Actions for Resolution and Prevention of Violence*

INTRODUCTION AND CASE STUDY

Santa Barbara is a beautiful, desirable and much favored city with a Mediterranean climate on the coast of California. Many rich and famous people live there. The city had no gang-related homicides from 1980 to 1991. After 1992, there was an explosion of gang violence.

1. IN RESPONSE:

1) Santa Barbara County Law Enforcement and Police Chiefs conducted a study which was published in the Santa Barbara County Gang Strategy in 1993.

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2) In September 1993, Fighting Back Task Force, a local Santa Barbara collaborative focused on reducing the demand for drugs and alcohol (and sponsored by the National Council of Alcoholism and Drug Abuse). Created a new Gang Task Force to reduce gang violence.

3) In May 1994, Fighting Back and its Gang Task Force met with, the Santa Barbara Foundation (which awards grants) to create a new all-inclusive Santa Barbara "Community Coalition" that includes most community based social and nonprofit agencies in Santa Barbara. With a grant of \$25,000 the new coalition was named, The "Pro-Youth Coalition," (PYC).

4) The PYC had its first meeting in November 1994. Members and representative agencies of the PYC chose to meet, act and work collaboratively together, persistently over a long period of time and included: social workers, youth service agencies, family service agencies, law enforcement, the justice system, the faith community, school systems, city government, county government, public health, housing, foundations, the youth, and the parents and families of the youth, artists, preachers, lawyers, grant writers, police officers, politicians, bureaucrats, psychologists, poets, gang members, ex-gang members, therapists, teachers, grass roots activists, neighborhood activists, probation officers, judges, actors, and many other professionals dedicated to reducing gang violence.

2. THE FIRST CHAIR OF THE PYC

Ms. Denise DeBellefeuille, a Prosecuting Attorney, later a Judge, was appointed the first chair of the PYC. In the early days and first two years of developing the PYC there were competing and conflicting interests. The meetings were a free-for-all. Anybody and everybody were offering their theories on why gangs existed and their solutions for reducing the violence. There was arguing, disagreement, fighting over grant money, trying to taking control and preventing the establishment of collaborative consensus, common purpose and progress. Apparently there was no sense of full community in the PYC and trust in each other. In May 1995, the National Funding Collaborative on Violence Prevention (NFCVP), [in 2003 renamed the Institute for Community Peace (ICP)] a national advisory, sponsoring and funding agency, which had been created by 28 private funding agencies and two federal granting agencies for national violence prevention in 1994, decided to also sponsor and support the Santa Barbara PYC (as one of its twelve local violence prevention support groups). Ms. DeBellefeuille after more than two years of service in extreme frustration resigned.

3. THE SECOND DIRECTOR OF PYC

In January 1997, Mr. Babatunde Fodayemi was appointed the second Director of PYC. He was already a high profile, respected youth advocate working in the Santa Barbara Housing Authority. He was trustworthy by almost all: the youth, elected officials, corporate donors and by the coalition members of PYC. He belonged to a gang as a young man in Harlem, New York where he grew up. Now he was an ex-

gang member supporting youth to lead normal lives in Santa Barbara. Folayemi realized the fair allocation of grant money to the diverse and plural agencies was a cause of division in PYC. He and PYC devised a funding formula to protect the smaller agencies from the larger ones. Also, members of the PYC having had the experience of being together for meetings, food and play in each other's company over many months began to feel more and more at ease as friends who could trust each other. Also, as members of the PYC community they wanted to collaborate, to resolve and reform the crisis of gang violence.

- 1) With the leadership of Folayemi,
- 2) The resources of the PYC and its readiness to act as a resource, a catalyst, fund raiser and fund granter, and
- 3) The funding and advisory support of NFCVP (ICP), the PYC with the consensus among its diverse, and multi-disciplined members, harmoniously agreed to work on ten basic pro-youth programs and strategies for addressing gang violence, its root causes, and its prevention. By the rules of the PYC, for any of the strategies to get funded, the requirement was that, there had to be at least three participating agencies involved. PYC provided grants ranging from \$15,000 and \$ 75,000 per year to work on the following ten strategies.

4. THE TEN BASIC PROGRAMS AND STRATEGIES OF THE PYC

The ten strategies were:

- 1) Addressing youth involved with gangs in the city of Santa Barbara in three ways: As Individuals;
- 2) As Part of a Family Unit; and,
- 3) As Members of Their Community.
- 4) Strengthening Families: Training families, and parents of at risk youth in communication and parenting skills, and offering community resource referrals.
- 5) Violence Prevention Education: Providing conflict resolution and cultural diversity training in elementary schools to youth at risk of gang involvement.
- 6) Youth Collaborative: Coordinating recreational, cultural, educational, and community service activities that promote a violence-free lifestyle.
- 7) Multi-Party Gang Mediation: Offering peer mediation training to gang-involved youth.
- 8) Pre-Employment/Life Skills Training: Extending personal development, self-esteem, and job-seeking training to youth seeking a violence-free lifestyle.
- 9) Mentoring: Coordinating alternative activities for youth with responsible adults, and also with ex-gang members who speak from experience, authority and credibility about the dead-ends of gang life, and the alternatives of a non-violent life of respectability, holding a job, earning a living, having a spouse and children, getting educated, becoming a contributing member of the community to which they could say "yes," and to former gang-life "no."
- 10) Educational Support: implementing activities designed to amend youth's attitudes toward school, improve school performance, and reduce truancy.

5. RESULTS

The results of the work of the PYC were outstanding. According to police reports, the 233 gang incidents in 1995 were reduced four years later in 1999 to 80. But, 65 of these 80 incidents were started by out of town gangs. As a result, in 1999, in City of Santa Barbara gang incidents were decreased dramatically to only 15, a highly significant reduction by 93 per cent (93%).

Additional improvements by PYC included:

- 1) A number of ex-gang members had become employed and were earning a living.
- 2) Youth became "all more relaxed about themselves; they looked a lot more at ease."
- 3) Collaborative partnerships continued to form among Youth-serving Systems, Community based Agencies, and Community Members.

The PYC goals continued to include:

- 1) Reduction of gang violence,
- 2) Reduction in the number of youth who join violent gangs,
- 3) Reduction in the frequency and distribution of violence among gang involved youth,
- 4) Increasing participation of ex-gang members as mentors in youth violence prevention activities, and,
- 5) Assisting youth who want to leave gangs in doing so, and,
- 6) offering services to young men who are newly released from detention camps or prison.
- 7) Additionally, The structure and function of the PYC began to change with control shifting from the top: social service agencies to those affected at the bottom: parents and families and young people who were in control and freely were able to make their own wisely chosen decisions, and actions that affected them for a peaceful life.

CONCLUSIONS

1) Collaborative solutions that are all inclusive among all stake holders create power, as here when community members work together in consensus, in harmony for a common cause or purpose to resolve the complex and conflicting problems that affect them. It could not have been solved by working isolated, alone, in competing and conflicting ways.

2) The results demonstrate the advantages of identifying and resolving the two mutually interrelated causers of gang violence equally at the same time: the individual violent gang member, and the gang violence causing environment-ecology-community-society.

3) Successful collaboration is an innovative method of resolving complex societal problems which are not traditionally taught in our "industrial age" mind-set of competition. Multidisciplinary collaboration needs to be learned in this "knowledge age," and more so in this "transition age," of collaboration, and require a con-

tinually learning mind-set, a growing mind-set, of an organization as one united team, and a longer time allotment to form transition to new habits and behaviors, to effect mutual enhancement of the capacity of each other, to share risks and rewards, to become mutually beneficial, to become more effective and successful and require commitment, belief, persistence and confidence in and among members of the same team and resolution of the common need, vision, values, and purpose, resulting in resolution, flow, and joy, and transition to new improved societies, with success created by and success shared by all members of the collaborative team.

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