

children's PRESSLINE

Fighting the growing gang violence

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Youth in upper Manhattan feel that gang violence is becoming a growing problem, one that sometimes causes a sense of hopelessness.

Stopping inter-gang violence has been a constant challenge for law enforcement.

Robert Boyce, commanding officer of the NYPD Gang Division, says, "We have to intervene and stop gangs that are warring against each other."

He notes that this gang activity may touch many areas of a youth's life. "Gang violence could be at schools," he says. "Some of the schools are more problematic than others."

The Internet is also making recruitment and violence easier for gangs. Boyce says, "We have a lot of small gangs popping up all over the city and a lot of it is fueled by the Internet. They'll go on and represent themselves and post a website, and they'll declare

their gang membership."

He adds, "It is difficult for us to stop the phenomenon completely because the Internet has proliferated it."

In an effort to curb gang involvement, police, parents and community leaders have been working separately and together.

Police are trying to get these gangs off the street by increasing the influence of community leaders. According to Boyce, the Gang Division does trainings and works with community groups, community boards and school groups throughout the city. They also support faith-based initiatives; these initiatives seek out certain clergy to get involved and do an intervention with a family.

Pastor Vernon Williams, president of Harlem Clergy and Community Leader's Coalition (HCCLC), says he is often upset because the area's young people are killing each other. "When gang violence is going on, I stand in the middle of it," he says. "Some people are scared of getting involved in the middle of gang violence because of their personal safety."

He says he believes, though, that his involvement is making a difference. "I know gang violence has been quiet for a little

while now, thanks to HCCLC," he adds.

Olivia Henry, a member of HCCLC, says, "I am afraid for the young people and how it affects my community. Yes, I am always in the middle of gang violence trying to stop it. We go out on a daily basis to patrol the neighborhood around my area. Yes, I think people are afraid of getting involved in stopping gang violence because they have the wrong perception about young people. Gang violence occurs in my community every day. My first instinct is to get in between young people and tell them to go their separate ways."

Police are not just relying on outside resources, but they also have programs in place for police intervention as well. Boyce says the Gang Division has a program to "get them to come join and get them on the right track, give them some supervision and some structure in their lives. In extreme situations, we'll go to the district attorney's office and help their family get that child out of that situation."

Family and community involvement are important because teens often have a variety of reasons for joining. Jackie Adams, co-founder of Harlem Mothers SAVE, has

lost two children to gun violence and believes teens join gangs for many reasons. "Fear, lack of self-esteem and desire for affiliation" are among the biggest causes.

Boyce agrees, adding that teens at a very young age are looking for their identity, so they join gangs "to belong to something." Others, he says, "will do it just to get to school safe."

Eventually, though, Boyce says these same teens "find that it's usually a dead end."

Adams adds, "Young people [need] positive alternatives to become a part of groups that promote life, health, love, respect and general well-being...and to [know] that there are positive ways to achieve their goals."

Additional reporting by Juan Abreu, Ghianthony Brito, Estiven Conill, Christopher de Leon, John Harris, Whitney Johnson, Victor Lebron, Jr., Miguel Lindsay, Naquan Nash, Jasmine Negron, Janeen Paul, Danisha Reyes, Patricia Rivas, Jessica Rodriguez, Jeuris Sandoval, Tiara Taylor and Crystal Vargas.

WHY THE WRITERS WROTE THE STORY

Here, the story's writers and reporters explain in their own

words why writing this article was important to them. Their names have been withheld for safety concerns.

"Gangs make my community a sanctuary for young delinquents to prey on innocent bystanders, causing unnecessary commotion, fear and numerous problems."

"A lot of teens get assaulted by gang members, and they get away with it. That has to come to a stop. Teens are not proud of how the city handles the gang-related crimes."

"One day as I walked out of the car with my cousin, we noticed a group of young men violently beating on an older Mexican man as they robbed him for his money, phone and iPod. I walked away feeling helpless that I couldn't do much to stop any of it and later called the police."

"Not too long ago, I was jumped and almost stabbed to death while coming out of school. I was forced to transfer schools and make new friends. This all happened because of gang violence; I was confused with another person."

"I hope more actions are taken towards gangs because even though gangs can't be stopped, they can lower the level of crimes going on every day."

'Bird Watching'



Some 6,000 New York City school children experienced the wonders of classical dance and music when the choreographer Larry Keigwin, Keigwin + Company and The Orchestra of St. Luke's recently staged six performances of a new original work reflecting the intersection of music and nature at the Tribeca Performing Arts Center (199 Chambers Street).

The work, called "Bird Watching," was set to Haydn's Symphony No. 6, "Morning." It was commissioned by the Jerome Robbins Foundation as part of the organization's New Essential Works program. Further funding was provided by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund's Charles E. Culpepper Arts and Culture Grants.

Showstopping PAL champs

On March 30, 2010, 500 Police Athletic League (PAL) youngsters from throughout New York City participated in a fun-filled day of games and laughter at the Police Athletic League's annual Games Day event at PAL's Edward Byrne Center in South Jamaica, Queens.

Manhattan champions from PAL's Duncan Center in Hell's Kitchen, PAL's Harlem Center, and PAL's Armory in Washington Heights competed within age groups against their peers from throughout the five boroughs. The young people, ages 6 to 18, went for the gold in double Dutch jump rope, basketball, Connect Four, Brain Quest, mancala, pool, Nok Hockey, the PAL Fitness Challenge, Sorry, Candyland, Memory and Word Scramble.

On April 1, over 400 PAL youngsters took to the stage in a citywide tournament for a day of dance, cheerleading and stepping at the Police Athletic League's annual Showstoppers Day event. Manhattan champions, ages 6 to 14, competed within age groups in each category while paying tribute to the Jackson family, with routines set to hits such as "Stop Pressuring Me," "Beat It" and "The Earth Song."

For more information, please visit www.palnyc.org.



Young people from PAL's Duncan Center in Hell's Kitchen perform their tribute to Michael Jackson during PAL's annual Showstoppers Day.