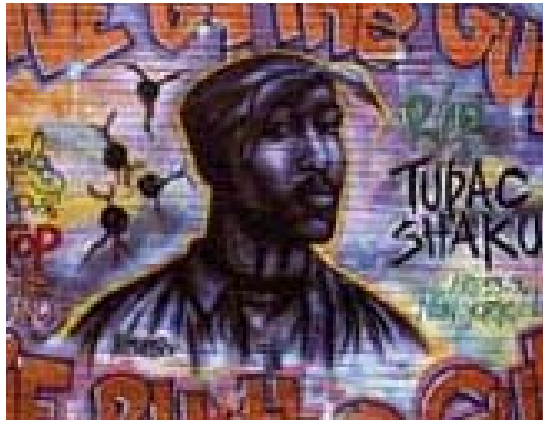


Background

Gang growth and gang violence have seen dramatic increases across the nation during the past decade. Media coverage of gang violence across the United States has enlightened viewers nationwide. Movies such as "Training Day," "Blood In, Blood Out," and "American Me," have brought greater notoriety to the gang scene. Communities across the country continue to search for answers to the ever increasing gang problem spreading across the United States. There are no simple solutions to this problem. Communities choosing to ignore or deny the existence of gangs will face a much tougher battle in the future.



The Orange County Sheriff's Office first identified emerging gang problems in Orange County in 1990. Drive-by shootings and other violent crimes were on the rise, culminating with an innocent bystander being shot and killed in a drive-by shooting in West Orange County. As a result, the Sheriff's Gang Enforcement Unit was established.

The Orange County Sheriff's Office established a pro-active stance in forming the Gang Enforcement Unit. Today, it continues to aggressively self initiate investigations involving gang related crimes. This unit has been the only full time gang unit in Central Florida since the early 1990's. Since its inception, the Gang Enforcement Unit has been on the cutting edge in the fight against gangs. This aggressive enforcement posture has helped our community create a climate in which it is difficult for gangs to flourish and grow.

The Street Terrorism Enforcement Act of 1990 was enacted into law in Florida as a result of an increase of violent crimes perpetrated by criminal street gangs. This law enables prosecutors to enhance the penalties of crimes committed by gang members. Despite much debate amongst school, government, and law enforcement administrators in Central Florida, this county does have an identified gang presence. The emerging gang problems are being dealt with very effectively by the Sheriff's Gang Enforcement Unit.

Since identifying and targeting known problem areas and key gang members, the Gang Unit has made a tremendous impact on drive-by shootings and violent crimes involving gangs. This impact is a result of the zero tolerance of gangs and the proactive stance taken by the Sheriff's Office on the gang issue. In addition, the Orange County Sheriff's Office Gang Enforcement Unit gives presentations to teachers, students, civic groups, and other law enforcement groups each year to increase the awareness of gangs.

What is the description of a gang member?

- * Usually male.
- * School dropout or truant; poor student who does not like school and who does not adapt well to school.
- * Negative contact with law enforcement.
- * Does not receive adequate family attention.
- * Victim of abuse or neglect, and/or parental brutality.
- * Economically and/or socially deprived backgrounds.
- * Negative role models.
- * Very streetwise.
- * Antisocial, aggressive, and hostile.

This parental guide has been compiled by the Sheriff of Orange County and the Gang Enforcement Unit to assist parents who feel their child may be affected by gangs or their activities.

**For more information,
please call the
Orange County Sheriff's Office,
Gang Enforcement Unit at
407-521-2400.**



What Every Parent Should Know



**ORANGE COUNTY
SHERIFF'S OFFICE**

Questions and Answers



What is graffiti?

It is one possible indication of gang activity in your area. Gang graffiti is different from other graffiti, known as tag art, and it takes a person with knowledge of gangs to understand it. Through graffiti, gangs are giving notice of their presence and activity. The graffiti can range from individual member's names to symbols, such as a pointed crown. Graffiti is how gangs communicate and tell others that the area is visited by a particular gang.

What should I do if I see graffiti?

Notify your local law enforcement agency so that they can take a report and photograph the graffiti. This enables law enforcement to monitor gang activity. If you live in Orange County, notify the Orange County Sheriff's Office by calling 407- 836-HELP (4357) or 407-521-2400.

How can I tell if my child is in a gang?

Be aware of the friends with whom your child associates. What kind of clothing does your child wear? Is a particular color or piece of clothing always part of what he or she wears? Does he or she have graffiti on their school book covers?

What should I do if I think my child is in a gang or about to join a gang? What if my child is the victim of gang intimidation?

Notify your local law enforcement agency or the Orange County Sheriff's Office, Gang Enforcement Unit at 407-521-2400 and ask that someone speak to you and/or your child. School Resource Officers are also available to assist you.

Are gangs active at schools?

In Orange County, the School Resource Deputies (SRO's) are trained in dealing with gangs. They are aware of kids who belong to gangs and monitor them closely while they are at school. The SRO's work closely with the Gang Enforcement Unit and the school, so if gang activity is prevalent, it will be immediately addressed and eradicated from the school.

Are gangs mainly comprised of disadvantaged youths?

Gang members come from virtually every socio-economic level in the community. They can be from the homes of the very rich to the homes of the very poor.

Are gangs racially segregated?

There are gangs that are comprised of one race exclusively and others that are integrated. In Orange County, we have gangs that are exclusively Black, exclusively Hispanic, exclusively White, and exclusively Asian. We also have racially mixed gangs.

Are gang members armed? What type of weapons do they carry?

Gang members are sometimes armed. They carry an assortment of weapons ranging from sticks and baseball bats to firearms.

How do kids join gangs?

Kids normally join a street gang by either committing a crime or being "jumped in." "Jumped in" is an initiation which involves other gang members beating the perspective member as a test of his or her courage and fighting ability.

Definition of "Gang"

According to F.S.S. 874.03, a "criminal street gang" is a formal or informal ongoing organization, association, or group that has as one of its primary activities the commission of criminal or delinquent acts, and that consists of three or more persons who have a common name or common identifying signs, colors, or symbols and have two or more members who, individually or collectively, engage in or have engaged in a pattern of criminal street gang activity.

Four Major Reasons Why Kids Join Gangs

1. **Identity or Recognition** - Being part of a gang allows members to achieve a level of status they feel they cannot achieve outside the gang's culture.
2. **Protection** – Kids join the gang because they live in a gang area and are subject to violence by rival gangs. Kids join in an attempt to obtain safety from this violence.
3. **Fellowship and Brotherhood** – The gang functions as an extension of, or substitute for, the family and may provide companionship lacking in the home environment.
4. **Intimidation** – Some members may be forced into joining by peer groups. Intimidation techniques range from extorting lunch money to physical assault.