

# TELEMASP BULLETIN

## TEXAS LAW ENFORCEMENT MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATIVE STATISTICS PROGRAM

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### Merging Community-Oriented and Crime-Specific Policing

Part Four of Seven

#### Youth and Gang Programs

*This is one of a series of bulletins describing the integration of community policing and crime-specific strategies among Texas police agencies. The strategies are categorized into Neighborhood-centered Approaches, Targeted Enforcement, Youth and Gang Programs, and Problem-oriented Tactics. Staff and consultants of the Bill Blackwood Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas (LEMIT) and the Texas Regional Community Policing Institute made over 20 site visits to Texas agencies employing these forms of crime-specific strategies. This year's Executive Issues Seminar Series, and this bulletin series, describes a sample of programs that appear to be working among police efforts to reduce crime in Texas.*

This bulletin describes youth and gang programs in Mission and Victoria. The Mission Police Department has concentrated upon schools. An astounding 22% of the sworn officers in Mission are assigned to school-based programs. Three

school districts within Mission's jurisdiction co-sponsor D.A.R. E., G.R.E.A.T., and Education Resource Officer programs. Victoria's approach focuses upon gang control. The gang initiative has eight distinct components, evolving to meet changing conditions. Responses range from social construction (promotion of "legitimate large gangs") to no-nonsense enforcement (gang grand jury). What both Mission and Victoria share in approach is committed, sustained, proactive intervention strategies merging community cooperation and crime control efforts.

**Special Bulletin  
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*Bill Blackwood Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas  
Texas Regional Community Policing Institute*

## Youth-Based Programs in the Schools Mission, Texas, Police Department

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### Program Summary

Deciding that "heavy handed" policing was not the most effective way to deal with youth crime, the Mission Police Department began an aggressive partnership with the three school districts it serves to provide a program-based police presence in the elementary, junior high, and high schools.

### Site Description

Mission, Texas, is located in Hidalgo County in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. The city's east city limit is shared with McAllen, the western city limit is shared with La Joya, and the southern city limit is the Rio Grande River/U.S.-Mexican border. (See also Internet URL: <http://www.mission.lib.tx.us/chamber/>). Covering about 30 square miles, Mission has approximately 42,000 permanent residents, roughly 62,000 residents between November-April (mostly retired long-term winter residents), and an undetermined number of undocumented aliens from Mexico and Central America. Of the permanent residents, some 80% are Hispanic, and 20% are white/Anglo.

The police department has 74 sworn officers, 20 non-sworn employees, and 21 sworn, non-paid reserve officers. Pre-service training is at the Lower Rio Grande Valley Police Academy in Raymondville. Beyond state mandated in-service training, both full-time and reserve officers are afforded specialized training to meet departmental needs and to aid in personnel development. Both the chief and assistant chief receive executive training at the LEMIT Executive Issues Seminars and the Southern Police Institute. The department and its personnel subscribe to a three point philosophy of the "3 D's": Determination, Dedication, and Desire.

### Program Description

Youth-directed programs based in the schools are designed for prevention, apprehension of school-aged youthful offenders, and opening lines of communication.

**Youth Services Education Division—history and purpose.** The Mission Police Department, in conjunction with the Mission Consolidated Independent School District

(C.I.S.D.), the Sharyland Independent School District (I.S.D.), and the La Joya Independent School District have joined efforts in an attempt to curb increasing youth gang violence and substance abuse. As a result of these joined efforts, these organizations have formed the Youth Services Education Division. The division consists of specially trained police officers who provide three unique programs to the elementary, junior high, ninth grade Mission campus, and senior high schools. The programs include Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.), Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.), and the Education Resource Officer (E.R.O.) program.

D.A.R.E. was implemented in both Mission I.S.D. and Sharyland I.S.D. elementary schools in the spring semester 1992 and the La Joya I.S.D. elementary schools in the fall semester 1996. G.R.E.A.T. began in the Mission junior high in the fall semester of 1993, followed by Sharyland junior high in spring semester 1997. The E.R.O. program was first initiated in the Mission C.I.S.D. in the fall semester of 1991, in the Sharyland I.S.D. in the fall semester of 1995, and in the La Joya I.S.D. in the fall semester of 1996.

**Youth Services Education Division—human resource management.** The police department has a total of 16 officers assigned to the Youth Services Education Division. Fifteen are officers in the schools (see table below) and there is one supervisor for all of the officers at all of the campuses. This translates to 21.6% of the sworn full-time Mission police officers being assigned to the schools.

**Youth Services Officer Assignments**

	D.A.R.E.	G.R.E.A.T	E.R.O.
Mission C.I.S.D.	2	2	5
Sharyland I.S.D.	2	-	3
La Joya I.S.D.	1	-	-

Personnel management points of interest related to this division include:

- The school districts pay the officers' salaries for the school year (177 days)
- During summers, officers receive:
  - Mandated in-service training
  - Special training required for their assignments
- During summers, when not in training, youth services officers are assigned to the patrol division—the purpose is to:
  - Renew the officers' expertise/awareness of "the street"

- Help keep avenues of communication open with other officers
- Help cover time for vacationing officers

**Officer selection.** Officers are volunteers and must have a minimum of two year's experience in the police department. There is a departmental review of the officer's work record and fitness report to determine how the officer's work experience and demeanor blend with the requirements of the school-based assignments. Following these steps, the officer appears before an oral selection board which is exclusively made up of representatives from the administration and staff of the school district where the officer will be assigned. While the applicant officer is introduced by an officer already working in the schools, the school's review board will select the officer.

**Agreements with the school districts.** In the case of D.A.R.E. and G.R.E.A.T. officers, responsibilities include curricular/teaching tasks. All officers work with both the penal code and the education code for investigation and enforcement. The police have jurisdiction over crimes against children during travel to and from schools even if the offense occurs outside of the agency's immediate geographic jurisdiction.

**Relationship between school-based officers and those in more traditional assignments.** Not surprisingly, initially, school-based officers were viewed as "kiddie cops." Patrol officers and detectives thought school-based officers did not do "real police work." With experience, however, generally attitudes of other officers have evolved. Now, school-based positions are viewed as an assignment just like any other position in the department. Indeed, most officers view the school-based officers as a good resource mainly because they recognize that the school-based officers have a great deal of contacts which can be used in investigations and problem solving.

**School management relations issues.** Each principal is in charge of his/her own campus and wants to have control over officers; thus, a mutually agreed upon arrangement had to be developed. The principal has direction over all curricular matters officers are involved in while the police supervisor has direction over all police activities. Occasionally, negotiation is required over authority to direct an officer; however, this is usually accomplished without much problem. There have been very positive reactions from school staff, teachers, students, and parents with respect to having officers in the schools. Some comments by and about Education Resource officers include:

- "Many kids contact me for non-police activities—at least half. In fact, the [high school] counselor refers many kids to me even though there is no criminal activity involved."

- "I provide career advice. I also try to work with the parents a great deal."
- "School staff members make me feel like I belong here. There is camaraderie."
- "Teachers love these programs. They like the officers and they like the security of the officer in the school."
- "The [school programs] are political animals. We have to meet the needs of the schools and community but not go too far."
- A Mexican National student attending school in Mission stated to an E.R.O.: "I see the police here to help us. She has warmth and says 'Hi' to us by our first name."

The E.R.O.s also challenge the students academically. For example, in one school, students who do well on their Texas Assessment of Advanced Skills (TAAS) tests get an opportunity to dunk the officer in a water tank. The first contact back at school for students who are suspended is the Education Resource Officer.

### Program Effects

While a formal program evaluation has not been conducted, there are some particularly evident effects of the school-based programs. Among those are:

- Notably fewer gang problems in the schools.
- Fewer crime problems, in general, in schools and on school property.
- Better liaison with the schools for identifying and resolving crime-related problems.
- Wider range of sources of information among school-aged youth to help solve crimes and problems.
- Significantly increased avenues of communication between the police and community, via students who get to know officers, which helps in crime prevention, problem identification and problem solving.
- Generally improved public relations for the police department which has resulted in greater respect and appreciation for the department that has also translated into better budget appropriations from city council.
- The school-based initiatives appear to have displaced much of the youth crime and gang-related activity out of Mission, mostly into neighboring McAllen.

**Special programs in the Mission Police Department.** A number of other special programs have been implemented in Mission which either directly or indirectly support the school-based programs. These include:



- Summer youth camp: Operated by D.A.R.E. officers, the camp targets "at risk" youth 10-13 years of age. It involves activities such as familiarization with the police and fire departments; field trips to boot camps, jails, courts, and other criminal justice facilities; and general education and awareness program.
- Citizens Police Academy.
- Citizens Against Auto Theft (CAAT): Citizens volunteer to have stickers placed on their car which give police consent to stop the car at night to determine if the owner is driving the vehicle.
- "Danger Stranger": A danger awareness program for children.
- Participation in the TRIAD Program for senior citizens.
- Citizen volunteer enforcement program for handicap parking violations.
- Mobile Community Centers.
- Monthly Neighborhood Watch meetings citywide "from the colonias to the rich side of town."
- Joint police and fire presentations for the Public Housing Authority.
- Public information officer position created; it is a "customer directed" position.

**Officer transfers.** A potentially problematic issue came to light when one E.R.O., who was anticipating leaving the

school after a few years in order to become a detective, was met with a surprise: parents, students and teachers signed a petition to keep her at the school. The department was committed to permit her reassignment, although it would have been disappointing to the community. The E.R.O. decided to stay in the school rather than accept the transfer. Such situations place ethical obligations on the chief—whose needs take priority, the officer or the community?

### Critical Factors

The Rio Grande Valley has a number of social, economic, and political factors that are changing quickly which, in turn, have an effect on policing. Specifically, in the case of Mission, these include:

- A new international bridge from Mexico into Mission will increase growth in the area of both lawful residents and undocumented aliens.
- Increased truck traffic between the U.S. and Mexico and new regulations associated with NAFTA—will likely place more burden on the police department.
- Growth of the Foreign Trade Zone (predominantly located in Mission) will place new burdens on the police department.
- New annexation to the city will add to both police department crime and service demands as well as increased school-based populations.

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**School-Based Officers' Contacts with Students—August 1996-May 1997**


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	Mission High School*	Sharyland High School*	Mission 9th Grade Campus*	Mission Junior High**	White Junior High**	TOTAL
School Code Violations	776	149	398	644	79	2,046
Gang Investigation	241	156	122	183	157	859
Other Investigation	263	41	307	92	35	738
Students Needing Advice	229	455	91	6	6	787
Verbal Confrontations	300	14	126	68	150	658
Disorderly Conduct	92	96	140	25	96	449
Parent Conferences	258	30	26	28	53	395
Classroom Misbehavior	148	69	97	41	31	386
Theft	105	60	22	4	29	220
Truancy	147	9	16	9	29	210
Criminal Mischief	34	46	40	7	5	132
Assault	54	25	32	8	12	131
Drug Investigation	38	4	32	12	19	105
Possession of Pager Device	72	0	3	1	0	76
Criminal Trespass	52	8	3	4	0	67
Drug Possession	10	6	8	4	9	37
Public Intoxication	23	5	0	7	1	36
Possession of Weapon	1	3	0	0	0	4
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>2,843</b>	<b>1,176</b>	<b>1,463</b>	<b>1,143</b>	<b>711</b>	<b>7,336</b>
Mean Contacts Per Day (177 Days in School Year)	16.1	6.6	8.3	6.5	4.0	8.3

\* Education Resource Officer

\*\*G.R.E.A.T. Officers also teach classes

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### Gang Prevention Program Victoria, Texas, Police Department

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#### Program Summary

The purpose of this program is to proactively use a variety of integrated approaches to suppress existing gang activity and prevent future gang involvement.

#### Site Description

Victoria, Texas, is located in the heart of a triangle with Houston about 120 miles to the northeast, San Antonio about 100 miles northwest, and Corpus Christi 95 miles to the south. Victoria, the county seat of Victoria County, serves

as a center for shopping, entertainment, and banking for this portion of Southeast Texas. Covering approximately 35 square miles, the resident population is approximately 63,000 while the city's service population is estimated to be around 225,000. Roughly 8% of Victoria's residents are African American and 32% are Hispanic.

This CALEA-Accredited police department has 103 sworn officers, 39 non-sworn personnel, and three reserve officers. Pre-service training is generally completed locally at the TCLEOSE-certified academy at Victoria College. In addition, the police department provides its own training as well as sends officers to other schools as needed. Both the chief and assistant chief regularly attend the LEMIT Executive Issues Seminars, and a lieutenant has completed Modules I and II of the LEMIT GMI. The vision of the City of Victoria to "enhance commerce as well as community," includes the police department as a critical partner. The Victoria Police Department has five officers in the schools: one supervisor is assigned to the alternative school, two officers in the junior high, and two officers in the high school.

## Program Description

This initiative has two primary officers assigned to stimulate action and coordinate initiatives. One is a sergeant who is a School Resource Officer and the D.A.R.E. supervisor. The second officer is an investigator who works primarily in public housing.

In determining gang activity, the department relies on the Texas Penal Code definition of "criminal street gang" in Title 11, Chapter 71, Section 71.01 (d):

"Criminal street gang" means three or more persons having a common identifying sign or symbol or an identifiable leadership who continuously or regularly associate in the commission of criminal activities.

Victoria's gangs are predominantly "territorial" in nature and generally Hispanic. They are not a recent phenomenon; indeed, in some cases, there are third generation gang members. Changes in the gang situation—predominantly growing violence and increased fear among the youth—fueled a new approach to gang control by the police department.

## Program Effects

The current gang initiative has eight components, some of which are more structured than others. These are described below (in no particular order):

**Graffiti education and eradication.** Patrol officers, school officials, and other members of the community have received training programs to recognize gang graffiti and report it. When reported, an investigator will photograph it, and then adult community service officers or probationers will immediately cover it with heavy paint. The surface is then later painted over to match the original surface. Prior to the training, some parents reported they had gang symbols on their property and did not realize it. Similarly, after the education programs, some parents reported recognizing tattoos on their children which were gang signs.

**Gang education (community and schools).** Having a slightly different orientation, this initiative has several facets. For example, gang and violence issues are included in the D.A.R.E. curriculum; the School Resource Officer will talk with youth who show interest in joining a gang to give them a realistic perspective of gang life. Officers will also speak to junior high and elementary school children in small groups or assemblies about gangs. This portion of the program also provides education to teachers and parents to recognize gang signs, clothing, and behaviors. Previously, the officers reported, teachers and parents had no idea about the meaning of gang symbolism; therefore, they did nothing

about them. After the educational programs, teachers and parents alike will call the police to report the symbolism and take action to get rid of it. Interestingly, many middle and upper class families whose children were involved in gangs were among the most difficult to deal with.

**Adopt-A-Gang.** This is a program which has intentionally not been "pushed," but permitted to evolve. Patrol officers in each of the city's five zones may voluntarily Adopt-a-Gang as a means to help youth who are in the gang as well as to develop intelligence. Experience has shown that this initiative requires both dedication and patience on behalf of the patrol officers. The first step is they must develop trust among the gang members. The trust is to show that the officers will listen to the young people and help them when they can. The Victoria officers have a wealth of examples when this has occurred. There is no effort to deceive the gang members, who know that an officer will take any enforcement action as necessary. The program permits the officer to get to know gang members and their families so that officers can learn more about gang members' behavior as well as who they associate with.

**Retaliation reaction.** A significant fear of many gang members (as well as non-gang youth) is retaliation for a gang event. Such diverse factors as a territorial trespass, an insult, an assault, or a homicide against a gang will typically result in some form of retaliation by the victimized or offended gang. As one investigator observed, "Because of retaliations, one assault can turn into 10." Retaliation is an inherent part of the gang culture, and perhaps even more intense in Hispanic gangs as a result of machismo. As a result, the police department has used this initiative to suppress retaliation after a known incident. Using diverse tactics ranging from the use of gang informants to "spreading the word" that the police are watching and will take harsh action against retaliation to using directed patrol, the police tailor their reaction to control retaliation.

**Gang Grand Jury.** One of the most effective strategies to suppress gang activities was a special Gang Grand Jury that investigated and indicted numerous gang members for a variety of offenses. Even "hardened" gang members were intimidated by the Grand Jury process. Moreover, the code of silence among gang members was effectively taken away because all testifying gang members assumed that the others were providing evidence; thus, they did too. While the Gang Grand Jury is not viable on an ongoing basis, it served as an effective tool for dealing with gang-related crime during extended peak problem times.

**Personal protection classes.** This was specifically designed as a summer program, initially directed toward youth who were at-risk of becoming gang members. The School Resource Officer taught martial arts classes to students with a social contract that the students would not become involved in youth gangs. Since the students were aware of

“gang colors,” the program promoted their interest in “colors” in terms of the colors of martial arts belts. The classes were also intended to promote mentorship for students who could not get involved in other activities, such as football, band, etc. Rather than turning to a gang as a social outlet, the personal protection classes were intended to provide a group where the youth could “belong” and have a basis of kinship with others.

**Schools/malls/community anti-gang programs.** As a means to minimize the visibility and the “copy cat” aspect of gang appearance, the police provided information to the schools and malls about the types of dress and behavior which were characteristic of gangs. As a consequence, the malls developed rules to exclude gang members and gang apparel on their property. Similarly, the schools—beginning with the alternative school—implemented a more restrictive dress code, which included:

- No earrings
- No “baggy” pants
- Shirt tucked in
- Students must wear a belt
- No emblems of such things as gangster rappers, alcohol, drugs, smoking, or sexual connotations
- No “unusually colored” hair

Effective fall 1997 the school district’s dress code is even more restrictive—essentially a type of broad uniform. While these restrictions will not cause an individual to leave a gang, it minimizes the presence of gangs and appears to largely eliminate the “wanna be’s.”

**Promotion of “legitimate large gangs.”** Under the assumption that many young people are gang members because of the social aspects and have a need for peer group membership, this strategy is to both promote and recognize membership in legitimate large groups such as sports teams, band, boys and girls clubs, Youth Opposed to Using (Y.O.U.), and similar organizations. Gang specialists from the police department feel that this approach has helped to positively sway some youth who were “on the fence” about gang membership. For those youth, the boys and girls clubs have been particularly important.

**Critical Factors**

The gang officers stated that the most important aspect of any program was to “get to know the kids.” The most effective tool was communication after building a bond of trust. The gang officers spent a great deal of time—including off-duty time—getting to know the gang members and their families. They also observed that showing “genuine interest” in the youth, not just a “police interest,” was an essential foundation for effective communication. The open lines of communication were important not only for diverting some youth from gang involvement but also as an intelligence tool. On several occasions gang members would contact the officers about potential gang violence or retaliation. Interestingly, while the gangs would “talk tough” and show their machismo, most of the young people were fearful of the violence.

It was the observation of the gang officers that many of the youth were involved in gangs simply for the kinship and mutual support derived from the group. Offering other group membership options sought to fulfill this social need.

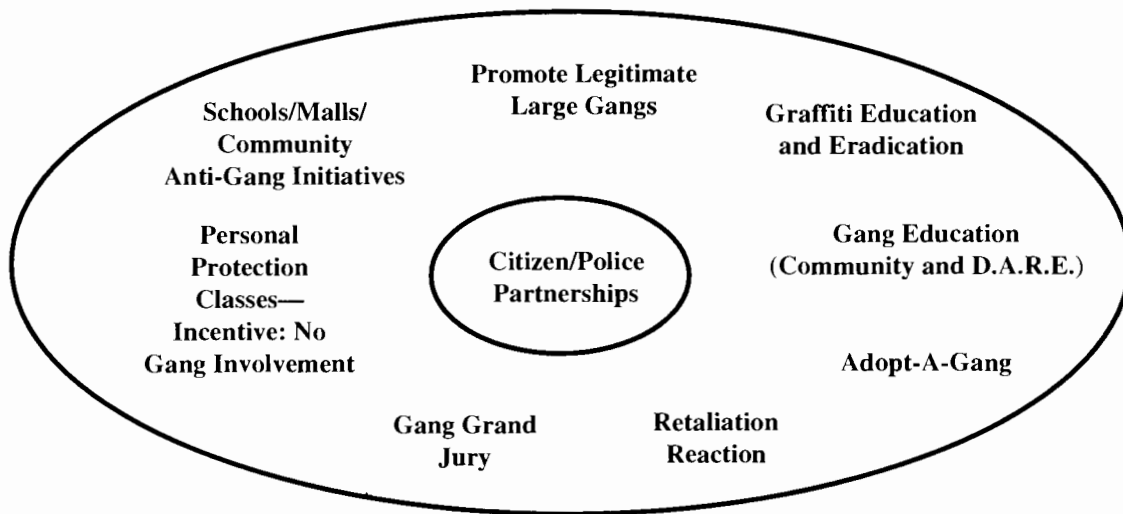
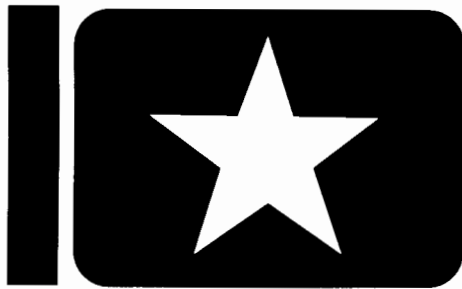


Figure 1. Components of Victoria’s Gang Prevention Program



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