

## Fort Bragg Comprehensive Gang Assessment Executive Summary

The Gang Assessment was carefully designed and administered to reflect the OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model in order to identify the “who, what, when, where and why” of local youth gang activities and to help identify needs and service gaps. It was commissioned and implemented over a one-year period by the Fort Bragg Coalition for Gang Awareness and Prevention, locally known as “CGAP”, a broad-based coalition of agencies and individuals, including representatives from the local school district; juvenile and adult probation and parole; county social service agencies; local nonprofit social service agencies; city government; faith based organizations, and outreach organizations

In early 2010, Coalition members agreed that conducting a Comprehensive Gang Assessment was crucial to enhancing understanding of local gang issues and improving effectiveness of anti-gang efforts. While some pieces of gang-related data were available, it had not been compiled into a report, and no comprehensive or systematic gang assessment had been completed for Mendocino County or any subset of the County.

At the March 24, 2010 monthly Coalition meeting, members committed to having the Coalition itself serve as the Steering Committee as defined in the OJJDP model, in order to collect and analyze data in the specific categories of community demographics, law enforcement statistics, student school data, community resources and community perceptions. The Steering Committee then appointed members to an Assessment Team and charged them with responsibility for research design and implementation.

Our Assessment found youth growing up in the Fort Bragg community are faced with a disproportionately high number of risk factors for gang involvement. Risk factors for gang involvement can be divided into five categories. Individual factors (such as alcohol and drug use, mental health problems, victimization), family risk factors (poverty, single headed households, and child abuse and neglect), school risk factors (poor school

performance, lack of connection to school), peer group risk factors (youths associating with other youth who are behaving in a delinquent manner), and community risk factors (tendency of gangs to concentrate in poorer areas and areas with high crime). For individual and family risk factors, our assessment found that Fort Bragg youth are faced with a statistically higher than average prevalence of alcohol and drug use, mental health problems, and victimization, poverty, single headed households, and child abuse and neglect. This Assessment also found evidence of the alarming presence of multiple school, peer group and community risk factors for gang involvement.

## Fort Bragg Comprehensive Gang Assessment Community Demographic Data

Fort Bragg is a small (population 7,025), rural community located in Mendocino County on Northern California's isolated north coast, about 100 miles north of San Francisco. Fort Bragg is the economic and social hub for the entire Mendocino Coast (approximately 15,000). Forestry and fishing were Fort Bragg's traditional economic base, providing stable, middle-class wages for generations of residents. Over the past ten years, regulation and over-extraction have forced a major economic shift from a resource-based economy to a 'split economy' where tourism and its accompanying lower-paying jobs are one of the few alternatives to the large "underground economy" of clandestine marijuana production and distribution.

Family and individual risk factors for gang involvement are particularly high in Mendocino County. According to the 2000 Census, residents of Mendocino County (pop. 90,206) have a median household income that is significantly lower than the state average (\$35,996 versus \$47,493). Mendocino County ranks worse than all but 12 of California's 58 counties on the percentage of economically self sufficient families (44%), and children 0-17 living in low-income families (57%). *91% of Hispanic children in the County live in low-income families.* Nineteen percent of county households are eligible for food stamps; the state average is 11%.

In 2005, *Children Now* reported that Mendocino County has higher than state average rates of children in foster care (15/1000 compared to 8/1000 for California). Mendocino County Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA) Child Welfare Services estimates that 85% of Mendocino County children in out-of-home placements have parents with substance abuse issues, and per the California Department of Social Services, at 27.7 per 1,000 persons, substantiated reports of child abuse are nearly *three times* the statewide rate. Mendocino ranked 46<sup>th</sup> in the percentage of children living in low-income households. As reported in the December 2010 OJJDP Juvenile Justice Bulletin, children who are victims of abuse or neglect are more likely to join gangs. The same report cites family risk factors such as single-parent households, caretaker changes,

poverty, and general financial stress as “potent risk factors.” The situation is even worse in Fort Bragg, where residents’ median household income averages only \$28,539 -- \$18,954 a year less than the state average! On average, a larger percentage of families in Fort Bragg live in poverty (11.9%) than either Mendocino County (10.9%) or the state of California as a whole (10.6%). According to the US Census, 22% of Fort Bragg households are headed by a single-parent, which exceeds State averages by 26% and also is a significantly higher rate than the overall County. In addition, female-headed households increased 42% between 1985 and 2000.

Fort Bragg residents are also more likely than County or State residents to lack the education they need to find decent paying jobs. Only 13.6% of Fort Bragg residents have a Bachelors degree or higher, compared with 20.2% of County residents and 26.6% of State residents. The economic situation has become self-perpetuating: the relatively low education and lack of skills of local residents limits opportunities for business startup, growth and economic development. The lack of economic growth and development acts as a disincentive for locals to seek additional skills or education.

Data shows a rapid growth in Fort Bragg’s Latino population in recent years, which has shifted the community’s racial demographics. In 2000, 14% of the population was Latino. By 2009, Latinos represented 23% of Fort Bragg’s population. A large number of young adult Latinos moved to the community in the 1980’s due to job opportunities in both the fishing and logging industries. Family members from outside the area joined them, and many stayed and began raising families. With the next generation now starting their families, it is easy to see why this year’s kindergarten class in Fort Bragg is 40% Latino. But the jobs with decent wages that brought them here began to disappear. The tourism industry became a major employer, and many Latinos have found jobs in this sector of the economy. The low wages in the “hospitality industry” help explain the high rate of poverty among Fort Bragg’s Spanish speaking families, and the need for many of those parents to hold down more than one job.

Data generated from the SMART Geographic Information System (GIS)-based issues management system for the Fort Bragg geographic unit supports our identified problems. Population indicators support risk factors such as high number of single-

parent households (46%); significant Hispanic population (26%); low Per Capita Income (\$13,991) and high percent of children living in poverty (24%); high number of young adults without a high school degree (35%); **zero** reported percentage of 18 to 24 year-olds with a college degree, and only 7% of 25 to 34 year-olds with a Bachelor or Higher degree. Housing indicators show 57% renter-occupied households. Community Risk Factor indicators include 24% of children living in poverty. School Risk Factors site the high percentage of 18 to 24 year-olds without a High School Degree (35%).

## Fort Bragg Comprehensive Gang Assessment Student and School Data

Fort Bragg Unified School District (FBUSD) has an enrollment of 1,900 students. The ethnic profile of students is distinctly different from that of the population overall, with 51% White/non-Hispanic, 40% Hispanic, 2% Asian, 2% Native American, and 5% of other or mixed ethnic backgrounds. Over the past ten years, the district's enrollment has fallen by almost 20%, while the number of Spanish-speaking students has increased by more than 40%, and the number of English Language Learners has risen to 23%. Many new students and their parents speak only Spanish. The School Resource Officers and youth serving agency staff have reported that cultural and language differences have resulted in increased racial tension.

FBUSD's schools include traditional elementary, middle and high schools, as well as three small alternative schools with a total enrollment of 60 students. Fort Bragg reported 427 student suspensions during the 2009-2010 school year. Of these, 160 (37%) were for offenses related to alcohol, drugs, and/or violence.

The 2009 California Healthy Kids Survey administered by Fort Bragg Unified School District (FBUSD) shows that self-reported alcohol, tobacco and drug use for 7<sup>th</sup> graders at 43% was more than twice the state rate. The same report shows that across all three surveyed grade levels (7<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grades), alcohol, tobacco and drug use and level of involvement was significantly higher for Fort Bragg students than both state and national averages, as follows:

TABLE 1								
	7 <sup>th</sup> Grade %		9 <sup>th</sup> Grade %			11 <sup>th</sup> Grade %		
	FBUSD	Calif.	FBUSD	Calif.	U.S.	FBUSD	Calif.	U.S.
<b>Lifetime &amp; Current ATOD Use:</b>								
During your life did you ever....								
Drink alcohol?	43	18	74	41	67	85	62	76
Smoke marijuana?	24	8	46	22	29	65	38	42

<b>Level of Involvement (High Risk Patterns)</b>								
During your life have you ever...								
Been very drunk or sick after drinking?	23	8	53	21	n/a	65	40	n/a
Been high from using drugs?	19	7	48	20	n/a	63	36	n/a
During the past 30 days did you...								
Drink 5 drinks in a couple of hours?	35	5	21	12	19	40	21	28

The above data illustrates a number of local personal risk factors that make children more likely to join gangs. Per the OJJDP December 2010 Juvenile Justice Bulletin, high alcohol and drug use, especially early problem behaviors as reflected by 7<sup>th</sup> graders above, increase the likelihood of later gang involvement “...particularly when alcohol or drug use is extensive and involves marijuana”.

During interviews with school administrators, we found significant concern about the ‘slippery slope’ of school failure leading to increased risk of gang involvement. Administrators expressed concern that the Fort Bragg youth identified as most at risk of gang involvement are those who lack connection to school and have had poor school performance. Behavior issues will often result in these students being sent to alternative or community day schools. Once older students are sent to alternative schools, they very rarely are able to make it successfully back into the mainstream school. Among students attending Fort Bragg’s non-traditional schools, 38% report that they are gang members. Students in Fort Bragg alternative middle school are disproportionately more likely than the general school population to ‘hang out with’ or date gang members or to be ‘jumped in’ to a gang.

A 2010 survey completed by Fort Bragg 5<sup>th</sup> graders participating in the GRIP curriculum found that 71% of these students have witnessed gang activities in their own neighborhood or town.

## Fort Bragg Comprehensive Gang Assessment Law Enforcement Data

Assessment Team members conducted a review of gang crimes in Fort Bragg from 2005 through 2011. The Fort Bragg Police Department began by running a report of all incident reports that had been flagged as gang related. Then, police staff pulled each incident file to fill in the Sample Police Incident Report form provided in the OJJDP model, recording data regarding the type of crime, perpetrator, victim, location, etc. These reports were then compiled into a spreadsheet by year, type of crime, and the gang which committed the crime.

Assessment Team members identified several significant findings from crime data. First, there are two main gangs in Fort Bragg. At this time there are approximately 82 Sureños (blue) and 45 Norteños (red). Hispanics are overrepresented in both gangs, but the Norteños tend to be more multi-racial, drawing in white and multi-racial youth, as well some African American and Native American youth. There is believed to be a much smaller number of motorcycle gang members. From 2005- 2007, reported gang crimes were much more likely to be seen as the activity of the Sureno gang than the Norteño gang. However, since 2008, this pattern appears to be reversing, with Norteño gang crimes rising rapidly. In 2010, reported Norteño gang crimes (37) surpassed crimes committed by Sureno gang members (34). This trend is continuing: so far in the first two months of 2011, 9 gang crimes were attributed to the Norteños and 6 to the Sureños. This finding matches up with the findings from law enforcement interviews: the Norteño gang has recently surged in membership and in criminal activity and in the past two months especially has been engaged in an active conflict with Sureno gang members, which has spilled over into assaults, vandalism, and attempted murder. This was evidenced in a very public incident in February 2011 whereby a local adult female gang member attacked a juvenile gang member, resulting in a fight that occurred at 'prime time' on the doorstep of a popular community recreation facility. This fight eventually involved a dozen youth, a weapon was allegedly used, and the adult female gang member was found to have her infant child with her in the car when she allegedly initiated the assault.

In 2005, vandalism and tagging was the most common crime associated with gangs, with 73 incidents reported. Only 1/7<sup>th</sup> as many vandalism crimes were reported in 2010 as in 2005. In interviews with business owners, community leaders, law enforcement and probation staff, a possible explanation identified was that vandalism and tagging has sadly become so commonplace that property owners have started to become resigned to it and it is less likely to be reported as a crime.

Data indicates that Coalition efforts in the past did have some positive impact, but these gains were short lived. The Coalition implemented anti-gang programs—including a suppression effort aimed at gang members on probation — in mid 2007 as part of the Title II effort. During this approximate time, we saw a sharp decline in assault and battery (11 cases in 2005, 1 case in 2008). However, when we look at 2009 through 2011 the data is clear and chilling: in 2009 there were 14 cases of assault and battery related to gangs, in 2010 there were 21 cases, and with only 2 months of 2011 now data available (January and February 2011) we see that already there have been six gang crimes of assault and battery. The overall number of non-vandalism or graffiti crimes associated with gang members has also greatly increased. In 2005, there were 21 other incidences of reported gang crimes other than vandalism/tagging. After implementing anti-gang programs we saw non vandalism crime drop dramatically down to 6 reported crimes in 2009. In 2009 the trend reversed, skyrocketing from 6 reports in 2009 to 75 non-tagging/graffiti crimes reported in 2010. Total incidents of gang crime rose dramatically in 2009 to 97 incidents. In the first two months of 2011 there have already been 21 of these significant gang crimes, including 3 incidents of drug possession, 4 violation of probation, and 3 cases of attempted murder. If gang crimes continue at this pace we will see more than 125 non-vandalism/tagging gang crimes in Fort Bragg this year.

The Assessment team asked law enforcement and probation staff to submit written answers to a variety of gang-related questions and conducted in person and phone interviews. Surveys and interviews with county law enforcement and probation officials during this Assessment revealed that Fort Bragg is considered to be the most active area in the county for criminal youth gang activity. Geographic isolation, distance from the

County seat, the economic situation, the rise of the marijuana economy, and quickly changing racial demographics were identified as problems that had allowed Fort Bragg's youth gangs to surge in recent years. With one juvenile hall facility serving the county, some youth end up serving detention 2 hours away from their home. Many will return home to Fort Bragg, where anti-gang services are limited and mental health and treatment services virtually nonexistent.

Three contributing factors were seen as most significant in explaining the failure of previous efforts to stem the problem of gangs: 1) the continued high prevalence of multiple risk factors in the community, especially poverty, family members in gangs, limited parenting skills, and parental drug and alcohol use; 2) the lack of a dedicated staff position to coordinate the overall anti-gang effort; and 3) the need to provide a more systematic approach for youth services providers, school administrators and probation officers to work more closely together in tracking and monitoring individual youth.

Fort Bragg lies at the heart of California's "emerald triangle" of marijuana growth, and the cultivation and sale of marijuana has a significant but difficult to quantify influence on the local economy. Over the past 20 years, Mendocino County, including the Fort Bragg area earned the unfortunate distinction of housing one of the largest marijuana growing locations in the US. With an economic void, outside elements began to take advantage of rugged wilderness areas to establish commercial operations. Many residents have also turned to these illegal activities to try to supplement low incomes, leaving children caught in conflict between home and school values. California's Campaign Against Marijuana Production has consistently seized 10% of all its marijuana from Mendocino County and in 2009 seized 231,802 plants here (4th highest in the state). There are credible estimates that illegal income countywide exceeds legal income. County Sheriff Tom Allman insists some marijuana is being produced by criminal gangs to fund methamphetamine production.

## Fort Bragg Comprehensive Gang Assessment Community Perceptions Data

Assessment of community perceptions on gang issues revealed that the majority of respondents felt that gang activity was a problem in Fort Bragg; that gang activity was decreasing their feelings of safety and well being, and that the presence of gangs has led to increases in prejudice and racism in the community. The vast majority of all respondents identified law enforcement and parents as responsible for reducing the gang problem, followed closely by youth serving agencies, school staff, and community residents. When trends are compared, there were significant differences in the answers given by Hispanics and whites, which helps to deepen our understanding of the significant differences in how white and Hispanic community members have experienced the local gang problem.

To collect Community Perceptions data, the Coalition implemented a Community Survey using the OJJDP model, conducted from June 1 to June 30, 2010. Three thousand copies of the Community Survey, in Spanish and English, were inserted in the water bills mailed to all City residents, and another 1,000 copies were distributed to a half dozen locations throughout the City. The hospital, businesses, schools, and nonprofit agencies were provided a sealed box for respondents to deposit the surveys, and surveys also included a mailing address for return. The survey was available online through *Survey Monkey*, and a link was posted on Facebook, emailed to Chamber of Commerce members, posted on community list serves and included in a press release widely distributed by the Coalition.

A diverse cross section of the community responded to the survey. In all, 488 people completed a Community Survey. Approximately 72% identified as community residents, 55% were property owners, 40% were parents, and 17% were small business owners; 66 of 488 respondents identified as Hispanic. Economic disparities and demographic differences between Hispanic and white racial groups found in Community Demographics data were also reflected in this survey. As with the overall Hispanic population, young people formed a larger part of the Hispanic respondent population

than for whites or the overall group. Approximately *seven times as many* Hispanics than whites reported being students (27.7% vs. 4.3%) and significantly more reported being parents (50.8% vs. 37.3%). Hispanics overall self identified with lower socio economic status. In addition, fewer Hispanics reported being property owners (33.8%) and small business owners (6.2%).

The majority of respondents of all racial groups, ages, and economic backgrounds felt that gang issues are a significant problem in Fort Bragg. However, Hispanic respondents reported more concern with gang issues in the community than reported by Caucasians: on scale from 'no problem at all' to 'a very big problem' with the response 'a problem' being in the middle of the scale, 73.9% of Hispanics agreed that gangs were 'a problem' or worse, whereas 62.9% of whites felt that gangs were 'a problem' or worse. Hispanics were also more likely to rate the community's gang problem as a more severe problem. Not a single Hispanic respondent reported that gangs were 'no problem at all,' as compared with 8% cumulative among all respondents. Indeed, the single largest response by Hispanic members was to rate the gang problem as severe as the rating scale allowed: 26.2% Hispanics reported that gangs were 'a very big problem' in their community. By comparison the single largest response group for whites was series 7 (one step up from the mid-way point).

The population of youth respondents age 15-24 also tended to report that gangs were more of a problem than the overall group: 72.3% of youth felt that gangs were 'a problem' or worse. No youth respondent reported that gangs were 'no problem at all.' The most common response (18.8%) among youth age 15-24 was that gangs were 'a very big problem,' the most severe rating possible.

In the full response population, vandalism and tagging were the most common problem reported, with 84.7% of respondents reporting that gang tagging is a problem in the community. More than 42% of respondents agreed that gangs created family dysfunction, and 53% listed school disruption as a problem caused by gangs. More than 48% were concerned about weapons crimes, more than 60% cited drug and alcohol crimes as a problem created by gangs, and 63% reported increased fear in their

community, the same percent who reported gangs had caused increased fear for their personal safety. Responses to this question by youth and Hispanics found that both subpopulations agreed in general with the overall response group about the myriad of issues that gangs had caused for their community, but important differences emerged that demonstrated that youth and Hispanics were specially impacted and concerned about the local gang issue. Hispanics were more likely than Caucasians to report that gangs caused 'family dysfunction' (56.1% of Hispanics versus 41.1% of whites). More Hispanics than whites reported that gangs created the problem of increase in violent crimes against persons (56.1% of Hispanics compared to 50.8% Caucasian). Youth were significantly more likely than other age groups to believe that gangs caused an increase in violent crimes against persons (62.1%). The majority of respondents (55.7%) believed the presence of gangs led to increases in prejudice and racism. This belief was even more widespread amongst youth age 15-24 (62.1%).

When asked to identify the causes of gang activity, five responses stand out as common among all subgroups: the vast majority of all respondents believe that gang activity happens because 1) families and friends are in gangs, 2) there are problems in the family, 3) gang members are moving in from other places, 4) boredom, and 5) there is a lack of positive activities that could serve as an alternative to gang membership.

In terms of addressing the gang problem, the majority of all respondents identified law enforcement (80.4%) and parents (79.7%) as responsible for reducing the gang problem, followed by youth serving agencies (49.8%), school staff (46.8%), and community residents (47.5%). Significantly more Hispanics, however, identified parents as responsible for reducing gang activity (75.8%). While the majority still assigned police the responsibility for reducing gang activity (72.6%), that answer was less popular amongst Hispanics than among the general population. Hispanics tended to give more responsibility to government (41.9% compared to 31.9%), community residents (51.6% compared to 47.5%) and school staff (50% compared to 46.8%) In terms of their own efficacy in response to gangs, the majority of respondents felt they have a role to play, and Hispanics were even more likely to feel they had something to offer the anti gang effort: 53.2% of all respondents reported they felt they could help improve their

community's response to gangs, with 68% of Hispanics saying that they had a role to play, compared with 52.2% for those who identified as white. This increased feeling of capacity to benefit the overall effort is especially significant considering that Hispanic respondents tended to report less socioeconomic status, with fewer reporting being property owners or business owners.

In regard to how the community 'should' respond to gang problems, there is significant common ground among respondents regardless of race. New laws and ordinances were not reported as a necessary focus by the majority of any racial group. In contrast, the vast majority of respondents across racial groups cite the need for more parental involvement (80.3% of all respondents 76.9% of Hispanics, 83.7% of whites).

The other most commonly endorsed responses to the gang problem were A) jobs and job training (53.9% of all respondents, 61.5% of Hispanics, 52% of whites). B) Mentoring programs (55.1% of all respondents, 53.8% of Hispanics, 58.4% of whites). C) School programs (44.7% of all respondents, 56.9% of Hispanics, 44% of whites). D) recreation/after school programs (53.6% of all respondents, 49.2% of Hispanics, 55.6% of whites), E) more police presence (55.3% of all respondents, 56.9% of Hispanics, 54.4% of whites).

**Additional data was collected to ascertain community perceptions of gang issues.** The Assessment Co-Coordinator, working with a bilingual/bicultural staff member of the local one-stop agency Safe Passage Family Resource Center, conducted a 90-minute focus group with eight Hispanic parents of youth who were elementary school age or older. The group was held in Spanish and English using dual translation. All attendees reported gangs were a problem in the Fort Bragg area. All attendees knew family members, friends, or neighbors who were involved in gangs, and all agreed that the gang problem is personally affecting their family and their community. As one man said, "A lot of these gang members have parents who are my friends. I've known a lot of them since they were in diapers and now they are in gangs." Another woman added: "We have a 15 year-old boy and two of his friends are in jail right now, and we feel so

bad about them because they are good boys, we care about these boys who are in gangs, because they are good boys, they are having problems.”

The most common gangs reported were Sureños and Norteños. Parents were reported as the most important group needing to address gang issues, followed by law enforcement, schools, and social service agencies. Most concerns centered around the Fort Bragg Middle School. All attendees reported concerns about the need for additional support services for at risk youth entering the middle school. “It seems like by the time they get to high school it’s too late, you need to get the kids and the parents when they’re in middle school, or elementary school, start having classes, because by the time they’re in high school those kids are not listening to the parents anymore, by that time it’s hard to change. When the kids get to high school and you try to discuss something like this they correct you, they yell at you.”

Students who were struggling academically were seen as the most at-risk for becoming involved in gangs. “...there are kids that are getting behind as early as kindergarten or first grade, so then what happens? I think a lot of this gang related issue is about how they feel about their academics and how it compares to the achievements of their classmates.” The lack of real economic opportunity for Hispanic youth, the prevalence of the marijuana economy, and the rise of gang involvement in manufacturing of drugs (meth) were cited as contributing factors for why gangs had increased in the community.

Assessment Team members from the Probation Department also conducted gang member interviews with five current gang members on probation, all male, age 13 to 17. Four self-identified as Spanish or Hispanic and one self-identified as multi-racial (white and native American.) Consistent with the research as to risks for gang involvement, individual, peer and family risk factors were especially high for this group. None of the respondents reported living with their father or a stepfather, all lived with their mother. All had siblings, most were from larger families with as many as 8 other siblings. All reported that they had drunk alcohol and all had used every drug they were queried about, most often starting use by the age of 10. All had other friends and family

members in gangs and “family” was cited as one of the most important reasons they had joined the gang.