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## **Gang Intervention and Prevention Part II**

By Dennis Freeman  
OW Staff Writer

Last week, we began a two-part series on gang intervention and prevention by examining the problems leading to gang life. This week, we continue the discussion, focusing on intervention programs and the community's views on black-on-black crime, the LAPD, and saving young lives.

### **INTERVENTION PROGRAMS GO BACK TO THE BASICS TO SAVE BLACK MALES**

Gang prevention and intervention programs are getting back to their roots. People want their neighborhoods safe again and are to trying to squash black-on-black violence.

They want the high mortality rate of black males, especially young African-American men, to go down.

In order to do that, several gang prevention and intervention programs in the city are specifically targeting African-American men to help them get their message across.

Kerman Maddox, who established the African American Summit on Violence Prevention more than a year ago in response to the escalating violence resulting from black-on-black crimes, is leading the charge.

Maddox has heard enough from folks talking about the situation and not doing anything about the problem.

Instead of just talking about it, Maddox decided to do something.

Meeting with community leaders and engaging with residents for more than a year now, Maddox and other African-American men have been scouring the neighborhoods in South Los Angeles trying to find solutions to the problem.

Every Saturday for the past several weeks, Maddox and nearly two dozen black men have been knocking on the doors of residents to get their opinions about the issue.

Maddox, a well-known political commentator, said the mobilization effort is a way for residents to express their concerns and views. It also offers a chance for black men to

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show residents their concern about the community they live in, he said.

To his surprise, residents have been quite open about the discussion on black-on-black crime and other issues regarding violence in their neighborhoods. One consensus he was able to get back from the residents is that parents are more worried about the safety of their children than anything else.

"They're not sure if they're going to come back," Maddox said.

"They're worried about their kids leaving home and returning safely. What we've found out is that a lot of people are concerned about the violence in their neighborhoods. We wanted to go door-to-door to see what they think."

Last year, the tragic death of Byron Lee, the South Los Angeles teenager who was reportedly shot 19 times by gang members, brought out an outpouring of anger from the African-American community. However, since that incident took place last fall, not much has changed, in terms of violence being reduced in hard-core crime areas of the city. Aquil Basheer wishes somebody would pay attention to the problem. Basheer, whose forte is preaching and teaching self-awareness and street survival, said it's time for black men to stand up and be held accountable.

"We need to stop the violence in our neighborhoods," Basheer said. "We're really looking out for young folks. We've been far too reactionary. We're trying to find a solution. We're ready to bring solutions to the table. How many times have we emotionally vented? What's going on with our community is they're getting fed up with all the walks and all these talks. "We are losing our black youth. We've got to eradicate the self-hate. We have to combat the violence by re-establishing ourselves and our youth. We've got to get with our youngsters and establish manhood and womanhood training. You talk to most of these youngsters on the street, and they don't think they'll live beyond 20. Black men have not stepped up to their responsibilities."

Basheer, president of Maximum Force Enterprises, a nationally known crisis prevention/intervention and violence-abatement program, said the role and the value of black males participating in the lives of young African-American men can't be understated.

"The role of the black man has to resurface," Basheer said.

"You don't tell children what to do. You show children what to do. A child has to see a blueprint. Black males are so important."

Basheer and Maddox hope to inform the public more about what they can do to help rid their neighborhoods of violence by holding a three-hour crisis survival safety training seminar this Saturday at Audubon Middle School.

Some gang prevention/intervention experts like Gerald Thompson, executive director of Pathways to the Future, said enough prevention work isn't being done because there are no mass crowds of young people to address. Thompson said the

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ideal format would be to talk to youths in school and have gang prevention and intervention be part of the education curriculum, just like sex education.

"There is very little prevention being done where you have a captured audience," Thompson said. "The kids on the streets are being recruited every day. We must get into the schools and tell our kids in advance (about gang violence). It must be part of the educational curriculum. What we've done is allow gang violence to become a culture. You can't do intervention from an office."

That's certainly not how the TenPoint Coalition, a faith-based and community-working group that ministers, mentors and closely monitors high-risk youth, does things. With the church as its backdrop, the TenPoint Coalition, a Christian organization, roams juvenile halls and the streets to do its work. But their services are pretty much the same as other city agencies. The important reason they're in existence is to save lives and to uplift, said Minister Mark Jennings.

"There is no difference in services provided to the children," Jennings said. "In the black community, folks have always depended on the church."

#### COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIP WITH LAPD TENSE, BUT THERE'S HOPE FOR SOLUTIONS

The gang problem and the rise of black-on-black crime in the city often puts the LAPD in a quandary with the African-American community.

The Devin Brown shooting outlines the department's problem with African Americans, where the lines of communication often get crossed between the police and the community. So, when a high-profile incident like the death of Brown occurs, relationships are strained, anger festers, and a partnership fizzles.

"People were clearly upset with the Los Angeles Police Department regarding Devin Brown," Maddox said. "But there are other young black boys being killed. They (African Americans) wish other shootings of young African-American men would get the same attention."

Much like the Brown incident, there have been other situations where the lines are blurred when it comes to knowing who is affiliated with a gang and who is not.

Teenagers typically mimic each other in clothing and actions, so determining who is and is not in a gang can get a bit confusing, for both the community as well as the police.

Complaints of harassment by the police have only strained a tenuous relationship between blacks and the police department in recent years.

Sometimes, numbers speak for themselves. Sometime they don't. When it comes to gangs, however, numbers speak volumes.

In January of this year, there were 589 gang-related crimes that took place in the city, according to LAPD statistics. Gangs

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committed 245 felony assaults, 50 witness intimidation crimes, and 20 murders.

Last January, there were 658 violent crimes committed by gangs. The drop in gang-related crimes is no coincidence. In five years, the LAPD has reduced the number of gang members in the city drastically. Five years ago, the LAPD recorded 63,106 gang members. This year, the department has on record 39,565 gang members.

Some citizens say they fear the police as well as any gang member on the street. Some African Americans say they fear walking down the street and encountering a young black male more than being stopped by the police.

"You're asking the police to protect us from us," said former state Assemblyman Rod Wright. "That's a point that people don't like to make. I'm much more afraid of getting shot by somebody walking down Florence Avenue than the LAPD—not that I'm not worried about the LAPD. But my fear of being harmed is much greater from somebody right there. There's just another side to that we in the greater community ignore." Roger Smith, a local minister, said he doesn't buy the notion that the community is against the police department.

"The Los Angeles Police Department is not the real issue," Smith said. "The issue is the attitude of 'them versus us.' There is no 'them versus us.' I'm not putting all the blame on the LAPD. It would be nice to say it's all rogue cops. It's not all rogue cops."

LAPD Lieutenant Dennis Kato, who is the gang coordinator in the department's South Bureau, said an incident like the Brown killing can just about wipe out all the good officers have done in the community.

How Brown died has the potential to erode a community partnership between officers and residents, he said.

"That's what's hard for officers to work through," Kato said. "The officers feel like, 'The whole community hates me.'" No one enjoys the fact that a 13-year-old died. We're not killing 13-year-olds every night. That one incident labels the department as being racist.

"South Los Angeles is probably the hardest place to work in the country. The challenges are tough. These officers are down here because they want to make a difference."



Kato, a 17-year veteran of the department, said one difference the department is trying to make is steering at-risk youths in the right direction through several of its gang intervention and prevention programs.

Kato has seen just about everything when it comes to gangs. Some of the conditions that some kids are subjected to leaves them no other option but going with a gang, he said.

That's why programs such as the department's Explorer Program, Jeopardy, Juvenile Impact Program (J.I.P.) and the Deputy Auxiliary Police (D.A.P.) are important to push.

"These kids need somewhere to go," Kato said. "I empathize with them. If I grew up here I would be in that environment."

You're not getting the same type of parenting you got 20 years ago. These programs fill that void. [But] intervention programs are only as good as their funding."

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