

The Kings County Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) Program

Final Evaluation Report



Submitted by
Transforming Local Communities, Inc.

March 2018

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Background of the Project

Kings County is located in the geographic center of California, in the agriculturally rich San Joaquin Valley. It measures 1,391 square miles with over 70% of its acreage dedicated to agriculture. The U.S. Census Bureau reported the population of Kings to be just over 150,000 in 2017. Kings County has only four incorporated cities, the largest of which is Hanford, the County seat, with a population of just over 55,500. It is followed in size by Corcoran, with about 22,600 residents; Lemoore, with a population of 25,785, and Avenal, on the County's far western edge, with 12,466 residents. The county is home to both the Lemoore Naval Air Station (pop. 7,438) and the Tachi-Yokut Rancheria (pop. 652). Unincorporated communities include Stratford, Kettleman City, Armona, Home Garden, and small labor encampments; these rural areas account for about 17% of the County's residents. Approximately 51% of the County's documented population is Latino, more than one-third of whom speaks Spanish at home. These figures do not include a substantial number of undocumented workers who live in the region, work primarily as seasonal agricultural laborers, and draw on local services during periods of unemployment. They do include, however, a large number of State prison inmates. The secondary economy for Kings County is prisons. Detention facilities include Corcoran State Prison, the Substance Abuse Treatment Facility (SATF) in Corcoran, and Avenal State Prison. Many Kings County residents are families of inmates that have relocated to be close to loved ones. This has created an added burden on the already strained local service system.

Kings is among the poorest counties in the State, with one of the highest rates of substance abuse, violence and teen pregnancy, along with some of the lowest rates of academic achievement, literacy, and employment. Along with being an Empowerment Zone, Kings County is a High Intensity Drug Trafficking area, with many of the poorest and most impacted communities falling directly in the path of major drug trafficking routes, including one of the routes used by the Arellano/Felix Cartel (Hwy 269, Hwy 33 and Interstate 5 intersect at the city of Avenal). With few legitimate opportunities for economic self-reliance, many in this area turn to the black market to sustain themselves and their families.

Headquarters for the Kings County Sheriff's Office is located in Hanford, with substations at Corcoran, Lemoore Court, Old Guernsey Station (South Hanford), Parkview Elementary (Armona), Kings-River Hardwick Elementary (North Hanford), and Kettleman City. The County deploys two multi-agency task forces: the Kings County Narcotics Task Force (KCNTF) and Kings County Gang Task Force (KCGTF). KCNTF executes investigations and search warrants for narcotic crimes and offenses. KCNTF has seized property, weapons, monetary possessions, and narcotics that have led to arrest and destruction of illegal marijuana grows.

KCGTF's mission is to provide prevention, intervention and suppression of local gang activity. KCGTF consists of the Kings County District Attorney's Office, Kings County Probation Department, Kings County Sheriff's Office, Avenal Police Department, Corcoran Police Department, Hanford Police Department, Lemoore Police Department, and the California Highway Patrol-Hanford Office. Kings County Narcotics Task Force and Kings County Gang Task Force collaborate on investigations to diffuse growing, selling and trafficking of narcotics and suppress communities with high gang-related activities.

As described in the original JAG grant application, due to its geographic position in the center of the state, Kings County is in the middle of a turf war between Northern and Southern gangs. The turf wars include rival gang activity as well as the transportation and distribution of narcotics through and within the county by gang members. In 2014, KCGTF reported increases in local gang memberships and local gangs working with Mexican Nationals directly tied to Mexican Cartel narcotics operations. KCGTF also reports an increase of prison gang members directly associated with La Nuestra Familia, Northern Structure, Northern Riders, and the Mexican Mafia. KCGTF investigations also reported a growth in prison gangs influencing local street gangs; increasing local street gangs' level of sophistication in committing crimes. As of October 2014, there were approximately 400 to 500 documented juvenile gang members in the County of Kings and between 2,000 to 2,500 adult gang members. A majority of these gang members identify with Norteño-70%, a significantly smaller population identify with Sureño-15%, and with Crips-10%. The remaining 5% identify with other hybrid type gangs that are created as off shoots from larger gangs. The average age of these juvenile gang members range between ages 10 and 17.

Gang-related activities vary throughout the county and are more prevalent in areas with lower socioeconomic incomes. The types of offenses committed range from petty theft to grand theft; narcotics-related offenses; assault with a deadly weapon; shooting at a dwelling; vandalism; attempted homicide; witness intimidation; auto theft; various weapons offenses, including possession of a firearm; and gang-related homicides. Within the county, the areas of Home Gardens, East and South sides of Hanford, Armona, Stratford, Kettleman City, and Avenal are identified as lower socioeconomic areas which encompass neighborhoods with higher gang activity and gang-related crime. The residents of these areas live in fear and intimidation by gang members, and rarely call upon law enforcement to report gang activity for fear of retaliation. These areas of the county are not law enforcement-friendly and do not trust in or identify with law enforcement, which places the residents at greater risk of increasing gang related crimes and activities.

Goals and objectives addressed under JAG funding are articulated below.

Area of Need #1: Gang Initiatives

Goal 1. To foster positive relationships for youth and their families with law enforcement, promote community involvement, and provide support for other contributing factors such as: drugs, alcohol, maltreatment, or poverty, which influence youth to associate with gang activities.

- Objective 1.1** The percentage of documented contacts with juveniles displaying gang affiliation, gang behaviors, and/or gang imaging which lead to gang registration will decrease due to the increase of law enforcement visibility in the communities and schools with greater risk of gang activities.
- Objective 1.2** Kings County Gang Task Force (KCGTF) will continue to intervene and refer youth meeting the criteria of Drug Endangered Children (DEC) to the DEC Social Work Program.
- Objective 1.3** By the end of year one, the city law enforcement agencies PAL program will be established, expanded or sustained to provide after-school leadership and mentoring programs to the youth and young adults of the targeted communities resulting in a decrease in the mandatory registration juveniles currently associated with gangs and/or demonstrating gang support through imaging, branding and other gang related activities.
- Objective 1.4** By the end of year one, at least 60 students at the targeted schools will complete the curriculums of the "My Life, My Choice, My Future."
- Objective 1.4a** By the end of year two, at least 120 students at the targeted schools will complete the curriculums of the "My Life, My Choice, My Future."
- Objective 1.4b** By the end of year three, at least 200 students at the targeted schools will complete the curriculums of the "My Life, My Choice, My Future."

Goal 1 Project Activities

Drug Endangered Children. The Kings County Gang Task Force (KCGTF) utilizes specific criteria to identify gang members and associates, such as tattoos, admitting gang membership, clothing and symbols, and association with known gang members. In 2014, KCGTF collaborated with Drug Endangered Children (DEC) Social Services Workers to protect the safety, welfare, and well-being of children experiencing abuse, neglect, and exposure to violence. The DEC program, a special investigative unit of the Kings County Department of Human Services, was already operational at the commencement of the JAG program; however, under a change in administration, the program was discontinued in 2016.

Police Activities League (PAL). JAG funding helped expand PAL in Hanford and Avenal, and established PAL in Lemoore. In Corcoran, PAL was incorporated into Explorers. PAL offers youth mentorship and a community-based after-school program as a crime prevention strategy. The primary goal of the program is to build positive relationships between youth, law enforcement, and their respective communities. A variety of educational and recreational programs and activities were offered over the three years of the project. PAL is designed to provide youth an opportunity to grow under the sustained guidance of dedicated adults, and to instill youth with respect and understanding for law enforcement officers and the laws which they uphold. It also develops

positive self-esteem and provides youth with the skills to stay in school. Across all sites, PAL involved law enforcement, parents and community volunteers, as well as the youth themselves.

My Life, My Choice, My Future. The Kings County Department of Public Health implemented the “My Life, My Choice, My Future” preconception, health-based education for youth between the ages of 8 to 17 attending schools identified as high risk for gang and/or drug related activities. The curriculum focuses on empowering students to make appropriate choices in life by making a life plan and promotes healthy alternatives for personal care. Three different curricula target three different age groups –8 to 10 year-olds; 11 to 13 year-olds; and 14 to 17 year-olds. The topics covered challenged students to establish attainable goals through a series of interactive courses that are centered on six specific topics: (1) making life decisions: What careers are of interest? Do they want to attend college? Do they want to have a family?; (2) healthy relationships: understanding feelings and learning how to decline peer pressure; (3) making a life plan: How do they plan to include children into their life? Do they understand birth control? Do they discuss birth control with their family or doctors?; (4) living a healthy life: What is their perception of the effects drugs, alcohol, and smoking to their health? Do they involve a health care provider for regular health concerns?; (5) being proactive: taking care of health problems and chronic diseases before it is too late. If sexually active, do youth know the importance of contraception?; and (6) learning their family's health history: Learning to be aware of health problems, such as diabetes, heart disease, depression, alcoholism, and drug abuse.

Area of Need #2: Juvenile Delinquency

Goal 2. To coordinate comprehensive prevention and early intervention through the Preventing Recidivism and Incidences of Delinquency with Education (PRIDE) program to reduce juvenile delinquency recidivism and provide long-term alternative solutions for youth exhibiting moderate and high risk behaviors.

Objective 2.1 By the end of year one, KCGTF will increase and diversify prevention and intervention tactics by expanding KCGTF's criterion which aides in the identification and tracking of gang members and gang associates in the targeted communities and public schools.

Objective 2.2 By the end of year one, KCGTF will improve documentation in the KCGTF Black Oaks database & the national gang shared database to identify and track juvenile gang registrants.

Objective 2.3 By the end of year one, KCGTF will have an established protocol which increases visibility in the targeted communities and public school for early suppression, intervention and prevention on gang-related crimes.

Goal 2 Project Activities

The Preventing Recidivism and Incidences of Delinquency with Education (PRIDE) Program. The project originally proposed using the PRIDE program to reduce juvenile criminal recidivism (future criminal offenses committed by youth who previously offended, reconvictions, re-incarcerations, or offending as adults), prevent moderate to high risk youth served by Child Welfare Services (CWS) from entering the juvenile justice system, decrease crossover youth rates, and reduce disproportionate rates of Hispanic and African-American youth in the systems. This was to be accomplished through comprehensive wraparound services targeted at moderate to high risk youth, including education, social work, behavioral health, mental health, physical education, case management, screening and assessment, vocational, substance abuse, anger management, and family-centered stabilization. Due to staffing and funding issues, the PRIDE program was never implemented as part of JAG. Instead, with permission from the funder, money to be allocated to PRIDE was diverted to a tattoo removal program.

iDream. iDream is a faith-based youth outreach organization founded in Hanford. The program offers faith-instructed guidance for moderate and high risk youth between the ages of 8-18 in the effort to divert students at risk for juvenile delinquency and criminal recidivism through instruction in life skills and involvement in pro-social activities.

Area of Need #3: Gang Violence Reduction

Goal 3. To Identify and address contributing factors that place youth at risk of gang membership and prevent behaviors of violence in targeted communities and educational environments.

Objective 3.1 By the end of year one, the PRIDE Program will establish strategies in collaboration with KCGTF to prevent moderate to high risk youth from entering the juvenile justice system.

Objective 3.2 By the end of year one, the PRIDE Program will establish strategies in collaboration with KCGTF to reduce juvenile criminal recidivism which leads to juvenile delinquency recidivism.

Objective 3.3 By the end of year one, KCGTF will increase referrals to the PRIDE program and the I Dream Faith-based outreach program, especially for moderate to high risk juveniles in the target population.

Goal 3 Project Activities

As discussed under Goal 2 above, PRIDE was not offered as part of Kings County JAG. Efforts under this goal were directed instead to creating positive relationships between law enforcement and youth at high risk of gang involvement by working closely with school resource officers in those school sites showing the high numbers of gang-involved youth. The Gang Task Force measures the

number of juveniles associating with gangs through various methods such as the Black Oak database and other shared databases as well as interfacing with juveniles in communities known to have high gang activity. School resource officers (SRO) are sworn law enforcement personnel assigned to specific schools within the County of Kings. SROs provide KCGTF documentation of youth involved in gang-related crimes at school. This information strengthens the KCGTF's ability to arrest, issue citations specifying violations, offenses, and infractions, and keep students safe from gang activity that may take place on campus.

Area of Need #4: Problem-Solving Courts

Goal 4. To improve access to appropriate health services (mental, behavioral, or public), job-training, and family services for at-risk youth within the targeted population.

Objective 4.1 By the end of year one, KCGTF and collaborative partners will establish a referral based system for the targeted youth and young adults of the JAG Program to health services, mental and behavioral, and public health, as well as to job and vocational training.

Objective 4.1b By the end of year two, KCGTF and collaborative partners will provide alternative solutions ordered by the juvenile justice system to service 150 targeted youth and young adults participating in the JAG Program.

Objective 4.1b By the end of year three, KCGTF and collaborative partners will provide alternative solutions ordered by the juvenile justice system to service 250 targeted youth and young adults participating in the JAG Program.

Goal 4 Project Activities

While originally intended as a cornerstone part of Kings County JAG, problem-solving courts were not implemented during the three years of JAG due to changes in local funding streams and administration at the stakeholder agencies.

Project Evaluation

The Sheriff's Office originally proposed to handle the evaluation of the JAG in-house; however, due to changes in staffing across multiple programs and within the Sheriff's Office itself, a decision was made to bring in an independent evaluator at the end of the final project year. The Sheriff's Office contracted with Transforming Local Communities, Inc. (TLC), a research and evaluation company located in neighboring Kern County that has an extensive track record of work with the County of Kings on multiple projects over the past twenty years. Recognizing the challenge of recreating the trajectory of services over a three-year period, TLC staff conducted multiple interviews with members of the Gang Task Force; law enforcement officials in Avenal, Corcoran, Lemoore, and Hanford; representatives from Kings County Public Health and the iDream Youth Group; and administrators of the PAL programs in Avenal, Corcoran, Hanford, and Lemoore. TLC staff also called

quarterly reports for data on services provided, and requested information directly from several program managers. Despite these efforts, the evaluation team is unable to confirm that data provided regarding the number of youth served are unduplicated numbers. Some data are missing altogether, due to changes in staffing that occurred within the programs and the subsequent loss of tracking sheets for certain data points. Nevertheless, even with these discrepancies, the evaluation team is able provide comprehensive qualitative descriptions of the programs offered, and some quantitative data to support most of the project's goals and objectives.

Program Outcomes

In this section of the report, each program or activity is described, and data are provided, where available, regarding the numbers served and outcomes related to the program or service.

The Gang Task Force

The Kings County GTF was the foundation stone of the Kings County JAG grant. The GTF is supervised by the Kings County Sheriff's Office, and is composed of local law enforcement agencies from Hanford, Corcoran, Avenal, and Lemoore; the Kings County District Attorney; Kings County Probation; and the California Highway Patrol. These agencies pool their collective resources to provide expertise and investigative support for the suppression of local gang activity and gang-related crimes. The GTF was created prior to JAG funding out of a need for qualified agents to fill in gaps for understaffed agencies, but also to provide a coordinated response to serious gang activity. As one GTF member stated:

A lot of deputies, when they start off, they know what gangs are, they know who the gang members are; but they don't know how to articulate that in a report to go to court, and articulate it to a jury. So, having the Gang Task Force...helps us out with the expertise at trial.

GTF members credit some of the increases in gang activity over the past several years to state legislation such as AB 109, which aims to divert non-violent offenders from the prison system. In addition, the three prisons located in the county create an influx of new families relocating to the area to be closer to incarcerated family members. One respondent explained,

Their mom or dad is in prison, so they bring their whole family with them—[who] are probably not the best people. I'm not saying they're all like that, but they bring some people with them that cause problems in our community, as well... So the dad's in it, brother's in it, son's in it; and so, it's just like a tradition.

According to the GTF, although there are some in-state and out-of-state Black gangs in the area, the majority of gang activity is comprised of Norteños, Sureños, and what the respondents referred to as "dropouts." As one respondent explained,

Dropouts indicate that [they're] not in the gang anymore... but they're still in gangs. They're just not in the original gangs that they were in; it's kind of a lifestyle that they know, and so they stay in the lifestyle—they're just not with their previous gangs...It's mostly a freelance.

Members of the GTF provide community presentations on gangs:

We've done presentations for business leaders, for teachers...[and] different departments around that may not be so involved with gangs, [but] that need to recognize the gang culture and what to see in some of their clients, or some of their students.

In the courts, a evidence from the task force is crucial to prosecuting a case:

We have to lay the foundation to why we believe this person is a gang member, [using evidence from] social media, Snapchat, Kytes, and all of those; it takes a lot longer than what it used to....

JAG has enabled the GTF to expand and enhance its efforts by covering overtime salaries for experienced agents. In an effort to improve community relations and change negative perceptions about law enforcement, some JAG funds were used to fund prevention activities, such as taking local kids to lunch. As one member described,

We go out...and eat lunch with the elementary school kids so they can see us in a positive way... A way that [doesn't include being] at their door all the time, searching their stuff and mom and dad's stuff. ...So we go out and give high fives so they can see us in a different light.

Because the GTF enables more qualified agents to participate in investigations and arrests, the respondent believed that this had lead to more precise arrests in the county, i.e., the ability to funnel investigative resources to target a higher yielding bust. The Sheriff's Office normally has a field supervisor heading the unit, and one or two officers assigned to the GTF; other, smaller agencies assign one officer to it. At the time of the interview, at the end of the third project year, staffing was fluctuating; Avenal and Corcoran had just lost patrol officers to attrition, and had to pull officers out of the GTF to make up the loss. As most of the JAG funding went towards overtime for agents, respondents did not appear hopeful for the program's sustainability in its current form. As one explained,

Of course the overtime is going to be what the big issue is... So we do our normal duties during the day—court and all that stuff, and they still want us to be visible and proactive and go out there and target gang infested areas. So that's what right now we are doing; it's going to limit the overtime but we're just going to need more agencies [that] are going to have to pay the overtime for it. Small agencies can't afford to do that."

The data. The GTF increased its visibility in Kings County communities by working closely with local city police departments to diversify suppression tactics. The GTF also worked closely with the Kings County Narcotic Task Force; members of the two units assisted one another in investigations. GTF investigators have continued to worked closely with jail and juvenile hall classifications, including jail

gang investigators, to further GTF investigations. GTF also assisted or took over various investigations for local police departments, as needed, resulting in arrests of suspects. As shown in Tables 1.1 through 1.3 below, in 2015, the GTF opened 57 new investigations, compared to 59 in 2016 and 161 in 2017. Tables 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3 on page 10 show the number of investigations closed each project year, ranging from 15 in 2015 to 14 in 2016, to 73 in 2017.

Table 1.1
2015 GTF Investigations—Newly Opened

	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4
Number of new investigations this quarter	11	24	11	11
Number of new investigations that were drug-related	0	2	0	1
Hours spent on new investigations that were gang-related	219	24	667	11
Hours spent on new investigations that were for other violent crime	219	3	667	n/a

Table 1.2
2016 GTF Investigations—Newly Opened

	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4
Number of new investigations this quarter	26	13	10	10
Number of new investigations that were drug-related	3	2	1	2
Hours spent on new investigations that were gang-related	25	6	Unknown	Unknown
Hours spent on new investigations that were for other violent crime	0	n/a	n/a	2

Table 1.3
2017 GTF Investigations—Newly Opened

	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4
Number of new investigations this quarter	63	37	39	22
Number of new investigations that were drug-related	0	3	10	1
Hours spent on new investigations that were gang-related	63	34	18	18
Hours spent on new investigations that were for other violent crime	0	0	0	0

Table 2.1
2015 Gang Task Force Investigations—Closed

	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4
Number of investigations closed this quarter	0	8	6	1
Number of investigations closed that were drug-related	0	3	0	1
Number of investigations closed that were gang-related	0	8	2	0
Number of investigations closed that were for other violent crime	0	0	3	n/a

Table 2.2
2016 Gang Task Force Investigations—Closed

	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4
Number of investigations closed this quarter	4	4	4	2
Number of investigations closed that were drug-related	2	0	0	0
Number of investigations closed that were gang-related	2	4	4	2
Number of investigations closed that were for other violent crime	1	3	n/a	n/a

Table 2.3
2017 Gang Task Force Investigations—Closed

	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4
Number of investigations closed this quarter	21	12	25	15
Number of investigations closed that were drug-related	0	2	7	1
Number of investigations closed that were gang-related	21	10	18	11
Number of investigations closed that were for other violent crime	0	0	0	0

Tables 3.1 through 3.3 show the numbers of arrests by the GTF in each project year. In 2015, a total of 20 individuals were arrested, none of them gang members. The number of individuals arrested rose to 45 in 2016, of whom 5 were gang members. A total of 43 individuals were arrested in 2017 and, of those, 27 were gang members. In 2015, the total number of felony charges for the 20 individuals arrested was 10. In 2016, 17 felony charges were filed, and in 2017, this number fell slightly, to 16.

Table 3.1
2015 Gang Task Force Arrests

	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4
Total number of individuals arrested	0	7	5	8
Number of misdemeanor charges	0	7	0	2
Number of drug-related misdemeanor charges	0	4	0	1
Number of felony charges	0	0	5	5
Number of drug-related felony charges	0	0	0	1
Number of gang members arrested	0	0	0	Not reported

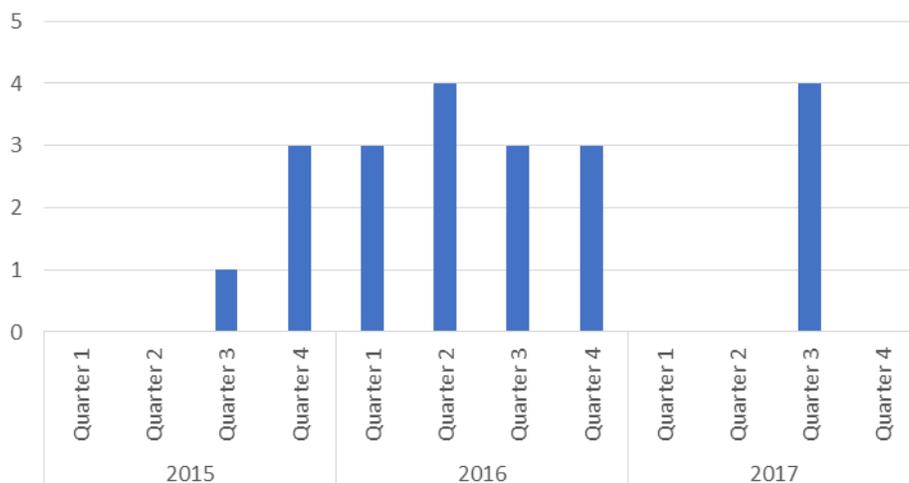
Table 3.2
2016 Gang Task Force Arrests

	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4
Total number of individuals arrested	16	11	10	8
Number of misdemeanor charges	13	Unknown	6	6
Number of drug-related misdemeanor charges	6	1	1	0
Number of felony charges	2	4	4	7
Number of drug-related felony charges	0	0	0	0
Number of gang members arrested	5	Not reported	Not reported	Not reported

Table 3.3
2017 Gang Task Force Arrests

	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4
Total number of individuals arrested	3	10	20	10
Number of misdemeanor charges	2	7	12	6
Number of drug-related misdemeanor charges	0	2	11	2
Number of felony charges	1	3	8	4
Number of drug-related felony charges	0	0	5	0
Number of gang members arrested	3	10	8	6

GTF Firearm Seizures, 2015-2017



The graph above reports firearms seizures for the GTF. Four firearms were seized in 2015, a number that more than tripled in 2016 to 13; however, no firearms were seized in the first, second and fourth quarters of 2017. Four were seized in the third quarter.

Data are presented in Tables 4.1 and 4.2 regarding cases received for prosecution by the Kings County District Attorney Task Force, which works closely with the GTF. Data were not available for

Table 4.1
2015 Kings County District Attorney Task Force

	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4
Number of target cases received for prosecution	n/a	n/a	n/a	3
Number of target cases prosecuted	n/a	n/a	n/a	3
Number of misdemeanor convictions related to target offenses	n/a	n/a	n/a	0
Number of felony convictions for target offences	n/a	n/a	n/a	1

Table 4.2
2016 District Attorney Task Force

	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4
Number of target cases received for prosecution	n/a	4	4	4
Number of target cases prosecuted	n/a	4	2	2
Number of misdemeanor convictions related to target offenses	n/a	0	0	0
Number of felony convictions for target offences	n/a	0	2	2

the first, second, and third quarters of 2015; however, three cases were received for prosecution in the fourth quarter; three were prosecuted; and one felony conviction took place. Table 4.2 shows that 12 cases were received from prosecution between the second and fourth quarters of 2016; and eight prosecutions throughout the year. Four felony convictions resulted for the targeted offenses. No data were available in 2017.

A key objective of the original JAG proposal was to see a decrease in the number of contacts with juveniles displaying gang affiliation, gang behaviors, and/or gang imaging which leads to gang registration, due to the increase in law enforcement visibility in those communities and schools with greater risk of gang activity. In fact, as might be anticipated in the first few years of a new initiative, the number of contacts actually increased by 61% between 2015 and 2017.

Documented Contacts with Youth Displaying Gang Affiliation		
2015	2016	2017
41	56	66

This is not necessarily a negative outcome, as it speaks to the increased presence of law enforcement in schools and communities that are at higher risk for gang activity.

The Tattoo Removal Program

The Kings Tattoo Removal Program provided gang affiliated tattoo removal for participants looking to separate themselves from gang activity and culture for employment purposes. As mentioned above, project staff requested and received permission to substitute this program for the proposed PRIDE program, which did not prove to be viable. The tattoo removal program was seen as an important support for people attempting to leave gang life.

A law enforcement officer involved in the tattoo program explained that the majority of those coming into the program had already left gang life behind, but were having a difficult time finding employment. He added:

It wasn't as restrictive as everybody thought it was going to be...We tried to make it [such] that for the individuals who were requesting services, it was going to benefit them. This would better their livelihood and make it easier to seek out employment or some type of training....

The program was open to anyone who identified as having gang tattoos that were visible on the face, neck, arms, or hands. The individual also had to agree to follow a treatment procedure that lasted six to eight weeks. The law enforcement officer noted that he was able to find program participants via an article in the newspaper, adding,

In dealing with people who are gang members—a lot of the time they don’t want to be seen contacting law enforcement.

The program was implemented under JAG, and completely funded by JAG. These funds covered the whole cost for the removal procedure, a six-to-eight week process, and covered the cost for a total of 43 individuals. The program worked with facilities in Hanford, Visalia, and Fresno, such as Creekside, Excellence Medical Group, and Mystique. In describing the removal process, the officer stated,

It is [painful] and it’s per square inch, so it’s a very expensive process to do and there are a lot of procedures....Two [prospective individuals] didn’t want to follow through with the procedures, so they just bailed out.

Despite the fact that the program was coming to an end in less than 30 days, the officer noted that they were still receiving requests from people interested in the program. The officer discussed the potential for some form of sustainability:

We actually have a waitlist going because there are so many people calling. We’re taking their name and number, just in case... Our portion [of the program] is going to be completed because of the grant... it’s going to be over, but from what I understand, [Kings County] Human Services is going to pick it up and they’re going to continue with it.

The data. As of mid-December, 2017, 41 individuals had been served by the program; 7 in Visalia, 33 in Hanford, and 1 in Fresno. Two additional individuals applied to the program but elected to drop out before the first procedure.

Tattoo Removal Program			
Facility	City	Number Served	Cost
Creekside	Visalia	7	\$23,970
Excellence Medical Group	Hanford	33	\$46,625
Mystique Medical Spa	Fresno	1	\$1,467

The Police Activities League

All of the law enforcement agencies serving the four incorporated communities of Kings County received funding for the Police Activities League (PAL). An overview of the program offered in each community is provided below.

The **Avenal Police Department** used JAG funding to enhance their existing PAL boxing program. The police chief and a school resource officer were interviewed regarding the program, which provides

free training for boys and girls, ages 8-17, and serves about twenty-five youth daily. Participants are encouraged to enter and compete in regional tournaments, and developing good habits at school and at home is also encouraged. Although the boxing program appears to be the main attraction, law enforcement explained that the facility serves as a safe space for kids to come to after school.

JAG funding was used to modify facility space, purchase new equipment, and offset travel costs and entry fees when youth participated in boxing competitions. Modifications to the facility space included the addition of a “homework room” where kids could do homework before or after training. There was a delay between the time school ended and training began, and the school resource officer noted that they were having a hard time getting youth to come into the PAL facility. She explained:

Typically,...if they go home after school, we have the inability to bring them back. So what we tried to do was remodel this back room of the PAL facility for a homework room... That way they can come and do their homework and then train, because homework is first, right?

Given the lack of supervised, positive alternative activities for children and teens in the community, youth have few options during after school hours, and it is during this time that they tend to get into trouble. Project stakeholders believed that simply having access to the homework and “hang-out” space at the PAL facility helps keep teens, in particular, off the streets, and out of trouble. One stated simply, “It’s a place to come.”

The officer noted that some youth, not part of the boxing program, were using the facility and new equipment just to work out. She gave an example of a success story:

There was a little girl that would come and she never was competitive, didn’t want to compete; she lost sixty pounds coming to just [train]. Several times I was in there working out, too, but I didn’t know her prior to coming into the program, and I asked her one day, “You don’t come and box, but you work out every day?” And she said, “Officer, I’ve lost sixty pounds since I’ve been here, so I’m just going to keep coming back, if that’s okay.” And I said, “Yeah, it’s great.”

The officer believed that simply having access to the facility, and the measurable progress that youth were making with their own training, provided them with a boost of confidence that could trickle into school and home life.

For those youth that did compete in the tournaments, JAG funding covered all associated costs, including transportation, food, and entry fees. One stakeholder explained,

Nothing comes out of pocket for them. We pay for food....We gas up the coaches before they leave...Take them out for breakfast...It’s an experience for the kids too; they get to go and meet other kids, and it’s all about interaction and going on a road trip without their parents.

Because Avenal is a small community, law enforcement officers have a number of opportunities to interact with youth and their families outside of the program. As the officer explained,

I'm a school [resource] officer and so I see them...If they ever have a problem, I know who they are from the boxing club and then I always tell them, "You know I don't want to see you in the office for something that you're in trouble for. You can stop me and talk to me, but you better not be in there for behavioral issues." A lot of them aren't, but every once in a while you know....If I have an issue with the kids at school I definitely let our coaches know, "Hey, this is what's going on with this kid."

The police chief discussed the positive feedback officers receive from parents. He explained,

When I'm out and about in the community, the parents occasionally tell me "Hey, Chief, don't get rid of the program," and I [ask], "Well, why is that?" I want to know what they will say. They hold it over their kids' heads to get them to do their homework....So [the opportunity to participate in PAL] provides a little more discipline at home for them, as well. If [parents] want to make us the bad guys, so be it.

According to those interviewed, the PAL program has demonstrated its success in a variety of ways. For one thing, youth from Avenal tend to place high at tournaments. In addition, the program serves as an incentive for youth to be on their best behavior at school and at home. Youth who are successful in the boxing program serve as role models for the younger students. One Avenal PAL graduate went on to be an Olympic medalist, and the police chief pointed out that these kinds of role models help to inspire the current group of youngsters in the community:

It basically says a kid from the small town [of] Avenal can make it big.

Both the chief and the school resource officer indicated that the only challenge the program faced was that many of the youth who participate are from seasonal working families with few resources, many of whom move seasonally, and some of whom by necessity must have their older children work, as well, when employment is available. Although they did not find it to be a huge obstacle, they simply noted that the seasonal industry can sometimes make it difficult to retain youth in the program. Nonetheless, both the police chief and the officer appeared confident that the program would be sustained at the end of funding. A number of youth had indicated a continuing interest in the program, and the agency had received a stream of donations from The Wonderful Company, which employs many workers in the area. The program also received a state-funded grant in July of 2017.

The **Corcoran PAL** was started in 2000. Lack of funding made maintaining a physical facility impossible; consequently Corcoran PAL sponsors other youth-serving programs, such as Little League teams and camps. The agency used JAG funding to cover the costs of the local Explorers Program, which serves about 18 boys and girls between the ages of 14 and 21. In explaining the limitations of the local PAL program, the Corcoran police chief stated,

Budget was one issue, but it's a small town and we were competing with other schools... the YMCA, for example. So we weren't doing as much good as we could.

By focusing on the Explorers, Corcoran PAL is able to provide a unique service to youth interested in community service and/or law enforcement careers.

Explorers emphasizes leadership training, mentoring, and community service. Depending on their activities, participants met on a weekly or biweekly basis. Activities ranged from structured trainings, ride-alongs, a physical fitness program, prepping for competitions, to community service. Although the participants learned a good deal about law enforcement from their participation in the program, the chief emphasized that officers are mindful of not over-exposing youth to the field of criminal justice. He explained,

We don't overtly emphasize a law enforcement career. We expose them to law enforcement; many are interested in learning about law enforcement. But we just want them to be successful wherever, and many of them have done that.

The chief noted that many of their Explorers go on to four-year universities, law enforcement and/or military careers, or full time work upon completion of the program.

Community service is a major aspect of PAL in Corcoran. As the chief noted,

We try to get the kids involved in things that they can see results from and they take pride in that. So they do an enormous amount of community service.

The chief provided several examples of the kinds of community service activities the kids take part in.

They do an event every year helping Rotary and [a local congressman] that's called *Stop the Bus*, where they collect school supplies for less fortunate kids... backpacks and pencils and what have you. They work on a lot of the Chamber events, like our Christmas Parade and our Spring Fest, which is basically our Spring Carnival and Parade. It's called the Cotton Festival, because we're in the middle of the cotton world here, you know.

In addition to these activities the funding that JAG provided enabled the program to take the Explorers on various excursions. Eight Explorers recently traveled to Universal Studios, and staff were planning a more education-focused trip to Washington D.C. As the chief pointed out, "Most of these kids haven't been out of the area."

Currently, there is no formal interaction with the local high school, but the chief mentioned that several of their Explorers are also members of the ROTC. Explorers must maintain a 2.0 grade point average. For those students who fall below that benchmark, the program is there to help bring their grades up, so they can continue to participate in the program.

Although the program fundraises on a regular basis, the chief was concerned that without the JAG funding, the program might not be viable.

With our Explorer Program, we've seen a really big spike in our kids signing up...[Our Explorers] are aging out constantly, and so that number moves, anyway. But...we were hovering around eight to ten steady kids and, like I said, we're going to be [serving] 20 here in a couple of months... The less that we can do with them, the less interesting [the program becomes] for some of the kids. But as these kids go back and talk about, "Oh we did this, we participated in this, we went here," other kids want to participate.... As much as we make it as exciting as we can, I think the kids themselves are the ones that lure most [prospective participants] to the program.

Still, the chief was hopeful that the department would find a way to continue the program. He added, "The JAG grant has been a really big help."

Hanford PAL operates three programs: a boxing program, the Explorers Program, and the Junior Explorers Program. The three programs serve nearly 200 youth at a variety of age levels. The JAG grant was used to expand and enhance each of these programs. A group of PAL staff and supporters, including officers, coaches, and teachers, met with the evaluator to discuss the impact of JAG funding the local PAL. One focus group participant explained:

[JAG] has enabled us to be able to expand our program, to purchase the items we did, and to make the program a little more special than [would be the case if you were] trying to always scrape for every single dime that you need to keep something going.

The boxing program is run by an officer who volunteers his time, along with six community volunteers. The program is operated out of a building near downtown Hanford. The lead trainer for the boxing program explained,

Early last year, they were operating out at the fairgrounds in a little... room. And then we moved here. I've been here since April or June of last year, and about 60 to 70 kids come through our doors [daily], and we operate now Monday through Friday from whenever they finish [school] to eight or nine [at night]....it's geared specifically to keep kids off the street after school; during that critical time from 3:30 to 9:00 p.m., they're not out there running the streets. They're here doing something productive and learning basic life skills, integrity, discipline, hard work and good work ethic... that's what we do here.

The boxing program typically has three different groups:

There's 8-13 year olds, who come in at 4:00; their program is about two hours. Then there's an overlap for when the high school kids come in and they're up to 18 years [old], and they go from 5:00 to about 7:00. Then we have an elite group who are USA Licensed Boxers, so these kids travel. For example, one of our boxers went to the National Championships, took bronze two weeks ago.

While between 60 and 70 youth were active in the boxing program, the two coaches have had to turn many youth away, because the space, although generous, simply cannot accommodate additional numbers, and an expansion of the program would require additional volunteer staff. To get into the program, youth fill out an application and pay a one-time fee of \$40, but staff reported that if somebody can't afford it, they aren't charged.

The boxing program maintains a Code of Conduct that youth must agree to adhere to. As the lead trainer explained,

We do have a Code of Conduct... We don't expect good grades, but we expect them to try. We expect them to not have behavioral issues at home, at school, and other secondary things that are outside of the Club. If they fail to [comply], we do suspend kids. We do counsel them about their conduct.

The Junior Explorers Program was created as an extension of the standard Explorers Program, and targets youth at the fifth and sixth grade levels. This program operates out of the nine different elementary school sites, and serves about one hundred students. The lead for this program explained,

We run an after school program that operates every day after school, from when school gets out until 6:00 p.m. Myself and the school resource officers, as well as patrol officers, volunteer; they come in on their day off, they come to our program and then they do part of the lesson plan, we do activities. ...Our goal is to start with fifth graders and sixth graders and grow it from fifth, sixth and hopefully seventh and eighth graders before we hand them off to the Explorer Program.

The Junior Explorers Program runs for twelve weeks, and upon completion of the program, the facilitators and PAL provide the kids with an end-of-the-year ceremony. As one focus group participant noted,

We want to give them a sense of moving on, so we promote them. We do a swearing-in very similar to what officers do when they promote to become a street officer.

The kids are required to attend all the classes, and are only allowed to miss two and still participate in this promotion.

The standard Explorers Program had 26 participants, ages 13 to 20, in mid-December, 2017. They met at the police department two to four times a month depending on their activities. The lead for this program discussed some of their activities.

We have community service events that are almost every weekend that they're going to. The 26 Explorers that we had last year, they gave two thousand hours community service in the City of Hanford. So that could be working at the Relay for Life, [at] parades in the city, those types of [events]...They're always supervised by an advisor....They give their hearts and souls

to the program. These kid show up and they ride along with an officer, they're running the radio, they're writing paperwork, they're just learning.

In addition to these activities, the Explorers also take part in state and regional competitions, and were quite competitive, having won 15 of the 16 competitions they had attended. The lead noted, with admitted pride,

We're competing against Explorers from LA and San Francisco and Las Vegas and we're beating those teams. And those teams have way more resources than we do, and way more funding than we do, and that's a testament to what a good job these guys are doing.

He explained that the goal of the program is to "get them inside some type of law enforcement career." He added,

Out of about 150 Explorers that have gone through the program that I've known personally, about 25 have been hired through law enforcement agencies, corrections, military...

Another focus group participant stated,

It's great to just give them leadership skills to go out and do whatever they need to do.

Despite the success of these three programs, the respondents did acknowledge a current gap of services and programs for seventh and eighth graders, noting that, "it poses a few challenges, you know, for credentialing issues, right, because you have to have a prevention teacher in the classroom." An administrator added,

With Hanford we just wouldn't have the resources available to have an additional person to run the middle school program and an elementary school program, because I anticipate that there will be 150 kids next year.

However, the program staff were hopeful that the success of their programs would make it easier for them to request "additional bodies" from the city council.

Nearly all of them credit the success of the three sponsored programs to vigorous community support and officer involvement. As one respondent stated,

A lot of this is the officers. They have an interest in it. I think they see the value of it, and they volunteer their time and they do a lot of work themselves. [One officer] puts in many more hours than he puts on his timecard and they like it. They see a value. You know, when you get interaction with the kids, positive interaction, I think it also improves your work environment. It's providing that service back to the community and the officers became officers because they wanted to provide a service to the community.

Another added,

This is a safe place, and almost a centralized location of town. We have kids who just come and sit down and watch. Well I'd rather have them here than walking the streets.

One officer relayed the positive response of a community member to the program.

I just got a text this morning from a lady who had taken on some kids and was raising them and the text read, "I really wanted to thank you for the work and time you're putting into these young men because they came from out of the area, far away." And she just wanted to thank the work that we're doing because one of the PAL kids is having some growth and they're improving their behavior at school and at home and she put it on me. But the onus wasn't on me, it was really on our program. JAG has allowed us to do that and I'm just one, you know.

Officers also attributed a noticeable shift in behavior to the success of the programs. A school administrator reported,

I can tell you that in terms of discipline—just across the board in the district—there has been a significant decrease in numbers of behavioral infractions....The number of suspensions and expulsions have been reduced significantly...We've got really solid data on that.

She added,

I think anything we do that's good for kids is a contributing factor in the kid's success.

There was a good deal of confidence among the group that the programs would both continue and grow. Hanford PAL has funding from local businesses to help it sustain its services. Plans are underway to continue to fundraise and develop new partnerships with other local industries. As one respondent stated, "As [the program] gets bigger, the city is going to see more of a value in it.

The **Lemoore PAL** used JAG funds to expand an existing wrestling program for boys and girls that serves between 20 and 30 elementary age children. The program consists of training, and competing in regional tournaments. JAG funds helped cover the one-time \$40 fee for those families that could not afford it. The officer in charge of the program volunteers his time. He explained that the local PAL opted for wrestling both because there were coaches available, and because wrestling creates a physical and mental demand that staff see as training in basic life skills.

It is the most physically demanding and it's one of those sports that you don't go undefeated. You're going to lose and how you handle the loss, how you deal with it emotionally, physically, and what are you going to do to? Okay you lost, why did you lose? How are you going to fix it? It forces you to work harder and in the end, [participants] develop a mindset that becomes [increasingly important] as they become adults....They start developing responsibilities that adults have, bills, jobs, kids...and [wrestling helps them] develop this mindset that, "Okay I didn't get this job, why didn't I get a job?" They go out and

they work harder to make themselves better. They go at it again and again and again. That's why we chose wrestling.

The demands of the sport, however, have also turned some children away from the program. As the officer noted,

When we started off, like most youth programs, ...kids are excited. They get in there, and we'll have 40 kids. But then these kids usually have a misconception about wrestling and [then] they realize what hard work it is.

The officer attributed this "self-selecting" out of the program to a lack of parent involvement, explaining, "like a lot of youth sports, parent involvement is not really there." As a way to counter this particular challenge, the respondent explained,

The first couple of months, we're elbow to elbow with kids, and then as the months go on, kids start to drop off and the ones that are committed, stay. The ones that find a passion for it stay, even if their parents aren't there. And sometimes we are the parents. They'll lose a practice match, and they'll be all upset and we have to explain to them, "Hey, you're doing great. You're developing, your skills are developing; you know, we just need to work on this, this and this." Or maybe they just [need] the experience, "Hey, give it time. You're going to get it." And so we're able to keep a handful of kids that way.

The officer told a story about a child in the program whose father was deployed to the Middle East, and who wanted to drop out of the program.

The mom brought him in and said, "He doesn't want to wrestle no more, and I'm making him come and talk to you." And [the boy] told me he just didn't want to do it anymore. And I [told him], "That's fine, wrestling is not for everybody...At the end of the season, if you want to quit and not do it anymore, I understand, but you [can't] quit now; the season is not over. [If you do], this is going to follow you the rest of your life, and you're going to regret quitting. Especially when you get older. You're going to quit something that was important, because you're quitting now. You develop the attitude of not finishing the job when you quit before you finish the job. Finish the job, finish the season, and develop the attitude that you're going to finish what you start. And then after the season is over, if you don't want to wrestle anymore, so be it. I hope you find something you're happy doing." And he came back and he started busting his butt in wrestling and he started winning and...he's even doing better this year.

Another challenge was finding funding for tournaments. Participation in tournaments is costly, but the program received regular donations from a variety of local sources, including \$10,000 from the Lions Club, \$1,500 donated from a private citizen to the Citizens on Patrol, and smaller, private donations that helped supplement the JAG funds used to cover program costs. However, the officer indicated that the biggest challenge was finding committed and qualified volunteers to continue running the program.

At the time of the interview, the respondent was no longer overseeing the program due to a shift change with the police department. As a result, and because several community members and parents wished to see the program continue, volunteer coaches and parents were picking up duties that were covered in the past by the officer. The shift change was due, at least in part, to limited staffing and to a rotation policy in the department, rather than to any insensitivity about the needs of the program; nevertheless, the officer's inability now to be part of the program was frustrating.

When we started, we said, "Okay, we're going to have a PAL program. What are we going to do for a sports activity?" The chief wanted wrestling. He didn't wrestle, but he knows wrestlers that are adults now, and he's seen my boys wrestle. He understood the benefits of it. So we started the program and I kind of made it abundantly clear that I can only do this if I'm on a shift that can handle it and that's being a detective....[I said], "You really need to start finding somebody that can take my place when I come out." And the thing is, there are people who are interested in doing it; it's just they don't have the ability either through their personal life or through work to step in. So at this point no there's no direct involvement [from the department] like I had in the program.

In light of the lack of direct involvement by the Lemoore Police Department, the future of the program appears to depend less on financial concerns and more on whether the program can find qualified and committed volunteers, both from the community and from within law enforcement, to keep it going. When asked about the program's continuation, the officer stated,

I hope it does, and I know a lot of parents hope it does. But again, I posed this question...two years ago, when we started the program. "What's going to happen if I'm not involved and somebody doesn't step up and take my place?" And the question was never answered. I mean they're doing good now without me, and I'm happy; I want the program to succeed. I can go on and on with the positive impact that it has on kids; but if you look at the future I can't tell you because I can't be involved. I'm not involved.

iDream

The Teaila Kidd Faith-Based Program began as the "I Dream Youth Group," operated by local resident and faith-based leader Teaila Kidd and her husband in 2014. The Kidds had an interest in giving back to their community by leading a group where kids could "have a relationship with Jesus Christ" and have an opportunity to learn about other life options beyond gang life. As the Kidds are involved in real estate, much of their program emphasizes real estate as a career option and they serve as mentors and role models for their the youth involved in the program. The ethos of the group is to expose their participants to alternative routes to success that do not include selling drugs, and to provide positive mentoring from adults that share their cultural identity. All kids are welcome to the program, but nearly all of the participants are African American. Ms. Kidd explained,

We're a faith-based organization, and we deal with teens between eight and 18. We do have some kids that will not leave our program at 18, so we still deal with them, and we really

enjoy that part. But, for the most part, what we do is teach them about having a relationship with Jesus Christ. That's our biggest thing, but we also most definitely teach them about investing in real estate, which is what we do; we invest in real estate, my husband and I. Really just life lessons...But for the most part the reason why we [started the program] is that we really had no one that looked like us that could sit down and give us the guidelines like, "Well how do you actually invest in this? Or how do you actually do this?"...We were like, "We're done with [selling drugs]; there's no need to do that. There are ways of making money without having to do that." We teach them a board game that teaches them about investing in real estate, it's called "Cash Flow." It really makes them think about what in life do you really want to do. If you got fired today would you still have money coming in? And so I fired them in the game, so they could feel like "Oh, man! I've been fired, I have nothing else, there's nothing there." And so you get to go back to where you started. It's teaching about investing."

The group meets on a regular basis and has gone on trips such as college campus tours and real estate trips that expose the kids to different lifestyle choices they can aim for. Ms. Kidd explained,

We take our kids—as far as doing dream building—we've taken them on trips to Fresno, we go look at model homes, we let them sit down, we let them say, "Okay, if this was my house, I would want this, I wouldn't want that," just so they can see that you don't have to rent the rest of your life.

Prior to JAG funding, the Kidds themselves covered the travel costs for the participants to go on field trips.

Before we got the JAG money, we paid for everything our kids did. So that's how we feel that God has blessed us to be able to give back to our community. We had a group of kids and we've taken them to a[n event] at...Stanford with doctors, for kids who wanted to go into the medical field. So they actually got to go in and suture an animal...to figure out if that's a field that they want to go into. We took a group of I think ten or twelve kids to that event. We've taken them to a historical black college event that they held in Los Angeles, just so they can be aware that there are colleges that are out there if they wanted to go [away] to attend [school], if they didn't want to stay here locally. So we've done things like that. And we've taken them to see Eric Thomas; he's a motivational speaker...who has been homeless.

Though the group emphasizes a faith approach, they are not affiliated with any one church. The Kidds believe that keeping the program distinct from one specific church enables the group to be more inclusive for participants who may not attend that church. As Ms. Kidd explained,

I do attend Second Baptist here in Hanford, but...my husband and I didn't want to get... "Because I go to that church, I can't attend this," or "Because you go to this church you can't attend that."

The program attracts most of its participants by word of mouth.

I just told the people about it, and they were like, “Hey, my kids are in, my kids are in.” So now it’s still word of mouth. I don’t care what they look like, I don’t care what nationality they are; we accept all kids. And we love it.

As the group expanded, they moved their meetings from the Kidds’ home into the Kings County Behavioral Health Building, where they were first approached about participating in JAG.

We had outgrown my home. So we started going to the Behavioral Health Building...I was going to a once-a-month [prevention] meeting...and someone said, “Hey, they may be doing a JAG grant. Is it something you’re interested in?” And I said, “By all means, if we can use the money for more kids to do more things, by all means, we’ll definitely take it.”

As JAG aims for violence prevention and programs to divert youth from violent activities or gang involvement, it was noted, “That is a big thing for our community, the gang things. We’re thinking about ‘That’s your family,’ and we take those issues head on. ‘Well if you’re going to go into a gang, and that’s your family, is anyone there to put money on your books if you get locked up?’ So just giving them real life scenarios like, ‘Well no one is going to put money on my books because they’re out there doing their own thing and taking care.’ So that’s not really your family. So when you break it down to their understanding, then they start to think, ‘Well this gang thing may not be what it’s really looking like,’ and I’m like, ‘No it isn’t.’”

Ms. Kidd added that most of these kids are simply looking for support and belonging, and they felt that their group helps to provide that as an alternative to gangs.

Although the program does not deal directly with mental health issues, the Kidds’ connection with Behavioral Health enables them to have easy access to information or resources that they can then provide for their participants. As Ms. Kidd explained,

I’m not trained for any of that. I have a degree in Social Work, but I haven’t practiced that. So that’s how I made the connection with [Behavioral Health]...They obviously can send me or refer me to someone else [for kids with mental health issues].

The Kidds are also proactive in terms of helping their participants overcome the stigma of mental health treatment, adding,

We had lessons on that, of just being able to talk about it, you know? If you feel imbalanced, it might mean you need a little bit of medicine, and there’s nothing wrong with that.

No challenges were mentioned, and the iDream staff believe that the success of their program was in the number of participants who keep coming back to the program. Although JAG provided significant enhancements that will be hard to replicate without additional funding, iDream is not dependent on JAG to be sustainable. The Kidds plan to continue the program indefinitely.

The data. The Kidds reported the participation of 40 youth in 2015, with 8 as new participants. In 2016, the program served 40 youth in each of the first three quarters, and 16 in the final quarter of the year. A total of 32 new participants entered the program over the course of the project year. In 2017, the number of youth was consistently 20, with a total of 3 new participants over the course of the year.

Kings County Public Health: The “My Life, My Choice, My Future” Curriculum

The Kings County Public Health Department used JAG funding to expand their evidence-based preconception health program. Two health educators participated in an interview with the evaluator, including the program’s administrator. As one of the Public Health employee explained,

This project came out of a previous grant that had been awarded to the Health Department by Waste Management out in Kettleman City....You may be familiar somewhat with the controversy around all the birth defects that were happening in Kettleman City a number of years ago. It wasn’t ever established that there was any connection; but one of the things that did come out of that is that Waste Management funded a Preconception Health Provider Tool Kit. And...this is the tool kit that was essentially put out for all of the providers in Kings County, but we also then had the booklet done that really outlines the program.

The program was intended to target four schools within the county to provide sex education that would focus less on abstinence and STD materials, but rather around family planning, the impact of early pregnancy, and healthy choices. As the respondent explained,

It’s about, if you are of child bearing age, both male and female, it’s something that we all should be thinking about. If you’re able to get pregnant or get someone pregnant, that’s what you should be thinking about. So it’s not just to talk about the mechanics of sex, but to actually think about, in the larger context, what that means. So it’s a really cool concept and a really great program. The challenge is getting into the schools.

This last point was not an understatement. Of the four targeted schools, only two were willing or able to accommodate the program, yet with major modifications. As the facilitator explained,

When we first received the grant, it was prior to the new State Law [requiring sex education] and so we targeted four schools throughout the county. The schools were chosen because they had a tendency for gang-related activities. They had a school resource officer there, and so initially I reached out to the school resource officer and he shared with me some of his presentations in regards to staying in school. And he gave me the contact information for the school nurses. He thought that would be the best way to get into the schools. So I reached out to them, and with one of the schools, I was told, “Good luck trying to get in here, here’s the principal’s phone number.” After a couple of attempts, I never got a call back and so I thought, “I’ll try again next year.” I was able to get into two schools. Originally in the grant we said six one-hour classes, and when I proposed that to the principal, [the response] was,

“There’s no way you’re going to get six one-hour classes.” So I had to condense all of this information into however many classes they were willing to give to me. At one school there were just three one-hour [classes] and they couldn’t accommodate my request for small groups of fifteen students...One school had only seventh and eighth grades; they gave me all the students at once and it was chaotic.

The new state mandate to provide sex education also posed challenges. As the facilitator explained,

At one of the schools I was able to do one class with fifth and sixth [graders]; that’s what we originally put in the grant, just kind of an overview initially and then get to the older grades and kind of break it down. So I was able to get four classes with smaller groups, and that worked a little bit better. I was able to answer questions better, and it better engaged them. When I tried to contact them again in the fall, [the administration responded], “Give us some time, we’re trying to work out something so we’ll call.’ And by the time it was spring, “Oh, we have that new state law. We’re going to start doing our own thing. Thank you. We appreciate you.”

The other respondent added,

That’s been really a challenge, especially now that they have this state law mandate. They’re really not interested [in our curriculum].

Reflecting on these challenges, the respondents believed that the schools were not on board with the program because of its new approach to sexual health, and because the schools were not included in the initial decision-making process. The staff at one school site wanted to see “scare tactics” used to keep young people abstinent—something that research has shown to be ineffective. One respondent noted,

This is a Preconception Health Program, working with youth to empower them to make life plans, to figure out what their goals are in the future, and what are their healthy choices. Then getting questions about, “Are you going to talk about STDs?” I said, “That’s not really my focus. We mentioned it in regards to its effect on the fetus and how that’s going to affect a healthy birthing outcome.” “Oh... But we want you to talk more about STDs.”

Making note of her understanding of many of the tough issues schools face in incorporating yet one more program into the school day, the other respondent stated,

They have so many things that they need to plan into a very limited amount of time...There’s no one school, class, or person that’s assigned to teaching anything about sex. A lot of times [the curriculum] is in a binder that’s on a shelf for a rainy day when they can’t go outside and do something. So it can be anywhere from a physical education teacher to a biology teacher, to a home economics teacher [teaching the curriculum]. There’s nothing at all standardized about who is teaching what and that, I think, was the hope for correction with the new state law. But it’s not necessarily being implemented well in the schools. I’m hoping that

whatever, or whoever is teaching this in the schools actually includes some of their preconception health kind of ideas into their curriculum because it really is an important aspect of learning about one's sexuality and [not] just the mechanics of sex.

After not having much success with getting the program running in the targeted schools, the facilitators shifted focus and sought other audiences. They took the program to the local community college, juvenile hall, and foster care life skills programs, where they were able to work with youth, it could be argued, that might actually be at higher risk of engaging in early sexual activity. Facilitators still had to alter the program in order to accommodate the realities and restrictions of these environments. They taught a 30-minute session to seven students in a Restorative Justice class at the community college. The program at juvenile hall was modified by units, because some minors are not allowed to be around others. In this case, the facilitator made four separate hour-long visits. The program at foster care was split into two one-hour classes. The facilitator attempted to include additional material above and beyond the program's subject matter in an effort to tailor the program to the various communities. She explained,

I added more information in terms of life planning, different school resources or scholarships, or things to look into and then I kind of tied into it. I printed out like a list of clinics that they can go to, or different school resources, like the school counselors and gave that to them...I gave them my phone number. The same thing at the juvenile hall; I asked the officers what kind of information, specifically, [I should include], so I kind of tailored it." The facilitators believed that they would be able to continue the program with both foster care and juvenile hall.

They also provided the tool kit to local health providers in an attempt to inform them about the program. One respondent stated,

We went to Adventist Health—obviously the largest health care provider around here. They have a regular meeting with their mid-level providers and we did a whole presentation for them. We went to medical staff meetings. And ...we made sure that we had the whole presentation done at the time. So we...had the providers educated at the time, and that was part of the Preconception Health Provider Program....So hopefully, as kids hear this, maybe it doesn't resonate with them in that moment; but they'll have this and maybe hang on to it and then who knows? Maybe if they get in to see a provider, and the provider is talking to them about preconception health, then maybe the light will go on and they'll connect the dots. You know that's kind of the hope in putting together a program like this, is that you can get the providers and the patients all kind of focused in the same direction.

Both respondents recognized that their initial approach towards their target audience—schools—was not very successful. Reflecting on how they would go about it differently in the future, one respondent stated,

I think we could have done a different approach to finding the target audience....So perhaps giving more thought to how we identify the target populations that we want to go for. And

then, honestly, now that the state law is in place, and supposedly the curriculum is being taught, working with the contracted provider for the school systems here that's providing the sex ed. Working with them to see if even this one part of [the program]... you could do theoretically in one class. It's six points that you have to make. So you could at least start the discussion and have that be just one of the classes that's being taught as part of the comprehensive sex education curriculum.

Both facilitators appeared to be passionate about trying to get the program in the schools. As one stated,

It's really a very awesome program, to be honest. You know, to have those discussions and to get the kids thinking about it. When do they get this kind of education? They don't. It would be awesome to really have this in every school.

Additional Sources of Data

Because JAG services address some risk and protective factors that are measured by the California Healthy Kids Survey, and several of the JAG-funded programs targeted students in local schools, data from three districts (Corcoran, Hanford, and Lemoore) are included here. Data from Reef-Sunset are excluded, because the district has completed the survey only once in the past three years, and comparison data are not available.

Data were available from the 2013-2014 and 2015-2016 school years in Corcoran. The percentage of Corcoran students who reported feeling sad or hopeless for two weeks or more in the past 12 months decreased by 15% among 7th graders and by 4% among 11th graders, but increased by 27% among 9th graders. The percentage of students who reported having seriously considered attempting suicide in the past 12 months dropped by 13% among 9th graders, but rose by 55%

California Healthy Kids Survey Corcoran Joint Unified						
Item	2013-2014			2015-2016		
	7th Grade (n=n/a)	9th Grade (n=158)	11th Grade (n=177)	7th Grade (n=233)	9th Grade (n=69)	11th Grade (n=73)
Felt sad or hopelessness almost daily for 2 or more weeks in the past 12 months	26	26	28	22	33	27
Seriously considered attempting suicide in the past 12 months	n/a	16	11	n/a	14	17
Missed school in the past 30 days due to feeling very sad, hopeless, anxious, stressed, or angry	6	3	6	2	17	20
Used alcohol or any drug in the past 30 days	11	25	38	9	11	25

among 11th graders. The percentage of students who reported missing school in the past 30 days due to feeling sad, hopeless, anxious, stressed, or angry dropped for 7th graders by 67%, but rose for 9th graders by 467% and for 11th graders by 233%. The most encouraging data came from self-reported 30-day alcohol or drug use, which dropped by 18% for 7th graders, 56% for 9th graders, and 34% for 11th graders.

California Healthy Kids Survey Hanford Joint Union High						
Item	2013-2014			2015-2016		
	7th Grade (n=288)	9th Grade (n=736)	11th Grade (n=594)	7th Grade (n=296)	9th Grade (n=612)	12th Grade (n=356)
Felt sad or hopelessness almost daily for 2 or more weeks in the past 12 months	26	39	32	30	34	36
Seriously considered attempting suicide in the past 12 months	n/a	27	17	n/a	19	15
Missed school in the past 30 days due to feeling very sad, hopeless, anxious, stressed, or angry	3	11	13	7	9	12
Used alcohol or any drug in the past 30 days	12	30	35	8	21	29

Data were available from the 2013-2014 and 2015-2016 school years in Hanford. The percentage of Hanford students who reported feeling sad or hopeless for two weeks or more in the past 12 months increased by 15% among 7th graders and by 13% among 11th graders, but decreased by 13% among 9th graders. The percentage of students who reported having seriously considered attempting suicide in the past 12 months dropped by 30% among 9th graders, and by 12% among 11th graders. The percentage of students who reported missing school in the past 30 days due to feeling sad, hopeless, anxious, stressed, or angry increased for 7th graders by 133%, but decreased for 9th graders by 18% and for 11th graders by 8%. Again, the most encouraging data came from self-reported 30-day alcohol or drug use, which dropped by 33% for 7th graders, 30% for 9th graders, and 17% for 11th graders.

Data were available from the 2014-2015 and 2016-2017 school years in Lemoore for 9th and 12th graders, but not for 7th or 11th graders. The percentage of Lemoore students who reported feeling sad or hopeless for two weeks or more in the past 12 months increased by 3% among 9th graders, but decreased by 16% among 12th graders. The percentage of 9th graders who reported having seriously considered attempting suicide in the past 12 months dropped for both 9th and 12th graders, by 21% and 10%, respectively. The percentage of 9th graders who reported missing school in the past 30 days due to feeling sad, hopeless, anxious, stressed, or angry increased by 25%, but decreased by 11% for 12th graders. As was the trend in other districts, self-reported 30-day alcohol

California Healthy Kids Survey Lemoore Union High						
Item	2014-2015			2016-2017		
	7th Grade (n=n/a)	9th Grade (n=401)	12th Grade (n=245)	7th Grade (n=n/a)	9th Grade (n=382)	12th Grade (n=221)
Felt sad or hopelessness almost daily for 2 or more weeks in the past 12 months	n/a	30	32	n/a	31	27
Seriously considered attempting suicide in the past 12 months	n/a	24	20	n/a	19	18
Missed school in the past 30 days due to feeling very sad, hopeless, anxious, stressed, or angry	n/a	8	9	n/a	10	8
Used alcohol or any drug in the past 30 days	n/a	28	27	n/a	19	26

and other drug use decreased at both grade levels, by 32% for 9th graders and by 4% for 12th graders.

Summary and Recommendations

The Kings County JAG project created a partnership between the Kings County Sheriff's Office; local law enforcement agencies in Avenal, Corcoran, Hanford, and Lemoore; the Kings County District Attorney; the California Highway Patrol; Kings County Public Health; and a local non-profit, the iDream Youth Program. Over the course of the three-year project, JAG funding paid overtime for members of the Kings County Gang Task Force and concurrently increased the effectiveness of law enforcement in attaining convictions for known gang members; allowed for the implementation and/or expansion of the Police Activities League in the county's four incorporated communities; funded tattoo removal for 41 individuals; supported the implementation of a preconception curriculum in two schools, a community college class, juvenile hall, and a foster care independent living skills class; and provided support for the iDream Youth Program.

The evaluation team offers the following recommendations to enhance program effectiveness, should JAG or other funding opportunities become available in the future.

- Involve all stakeholders in the development of the logic model and/or scope of work**
 Three components of the original grant proposal could not be implemented. JAG was unable to implement the PRIDE program, and funding went instead to support tattoo removal. In addition, officers were unable to refer youth to the Drug Endangered Children (DEC) Social Work Program, because a new administrator at the Kings County Department of Human Services elected to

discontinue the program. Finally, JAG was unable to refer to a Problem-solving Court, because though proposed, the court never came into being. In addition, only two of the four school districts named in the initial JAG application allowed Kings County Public Health access to classrooms in order to offer the My Life, My Choice, My Future curriculum to students. None of the schools allowed staff to implement this evidence-based curriculum with fidelity.

While these are not uncommon scenarios when programming depends on partners to carry out concurrent activities (particularly when those activities are not receiving funding from the project), some of these issues might be resolved by bringing all stakeholders, including those only tangentially connected to the project (such as the schools) to the table for the purpose of developing a strategic plan and scope of work for the project at the outset of planning. The more involvement stakeholders have in the process, the more buy-in they have, and the easier it is to continue programs and services, even with administrative and staff turnover.

- **Involve the local program evaluator as early as possible during program implementation**

Having an evaluator involved in the outset of project—in fact, at the very inception of a funding proposal—is an ideal scenario. The evaluator can help “translate” the strategic plan or scope of work into measurable goals and objectives, delineating between process measures that provide data about how a program is being implemented (for example, how many youth are served, and at what “dosage”) and outcome measures that tell us how the lives of those targeted for services actually changed as a result of the program (for example, rates of employment among those receiving tattoo removal). However ideal, it is often not possible for stakeholders to involve evaluators during the phase of program development, because projects may be required by the funder to go to bid for their evaluator. When this is the case, it is critical that the evaluator be selected as early in the program implementation phase as possible. Even if project supervisors prefer to handle most data collection in-house, it is important to have an outside evaluator work with the team to develop the evaluation plan, develop data tracking instruments, and ensure that appropriate measures are in place that will give the team data needed to make mid-course adjustments in programming, as well as measurable outcomes at the end of the project. In the case of Kings JAG, the initial plan to handle evaluation services in-house was not inappropriate, given the size of the program, but staff turnover and changes in administration across several programs led to gaps in data collection that could not be ameliorated later on. The services of an outside evaluator can provide continuity when program administrators change.

Despite the limited availability of outcome data, there was general consensus among project stakeholders, as evidenced by strong anecdotal data, that the Kings County JAG program was successful in expanding the work of the county’s Gang Task Force; providing life-changing support to individuals trying to leave behind their gang affiliations, by providing tattoo removal; and providing service opportunities, field trips, and physical activities to a large number of underserved young people county-wide who would otherwise never have these opportunities. In accomplishing these objectives, the project made progress in meeting its mission of bettering the relationship between law enforcement and community members living in areas of Kings County at high risk for gang activity.