

City of Vista Gang Reduction, Intervention, and Prevention Report

Executive summary

Background and purpose

Motivated by past success and a strong collaborative environment, the City of Vista (Vista) teamed with stakeholders serving Vista’s Townsite neighborhood to partner on a three-year California Gang Reduction, Intervention, and Prevention (CalGRIP) grant. The Townsite neighborhood was selected because of the higher crime rate compared to the rest of Vista; a larger concentration of gang activity, mostly from the well-established Vista Home Boys (VHB) that had 181181 documented members and over 100 affiliates at the beginning of the grant; and series of shootings that sparked retaliatory violence. Vista implemented the City of Vista Gang Reduction Intervention, and Prevention program (VGRIP) from January 2015 to December 2017, along with its partners, the Vista Sheriff’s station, San Diego County Probation, Vista Unified School District, two community-based agencies that serve the neighborhood (North County Lifeline and Vista Community Center), and the Criminal Justice Research Division of San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) (as the evaluator).

The VGRIP program design was influenced by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Gang Prevention Model and employed a multi-level approach of prevention, intervention, and suppression activities to reduce gang involvement and gang crime in the Townsite neighborhood of Vista. The specific activities were evidence-based, provided in both the community and in the neighborhood schools, and targeted youth and their families.

Figure 1

VGRIP: prevention, intervention, and suppression services to address gangs activity



SANDAG was responsible for conducting both a process and impact evaluation to measure if VGRIP was implemented as designed, and what effect it had in reaching its goals. The evaluation design utilized a mix-method, pre-post quasi-experimental design. For individual measures (e.g. recidivism) a pre-post, single group design was used and for aggregate data, changes in violent crime rates were compared over time (three-years prior to during the grant period) and between the target area and Vista. The evaluation was designed with the principles of "Action Research" driving the process. SANDAG research staff were involved in the collaborative process from the beginning and charged with providing timely and valid data to inform the ongoing assessment of the project and to allow the collaborative to make any mid-course adjustments.

The results of the evaluation showed that VGRIP was implemented as designed and achieved or exceeded almost all of its objectives and goal.

VGRIP was implemented as planned and achieved its goal and objectives

To address gang activity in the Townsite neighborhood, the goal of VGRIP was to reduce gang involvement through targeted prevention, intervention, and suppression efforts. To accomplish this goal, VGRIP offered a variety of programs, which were guided by eight objectives that had measurable outcomes.

Prevention components

Guiding Good Choices

Vista Community Clinic (VCC) offered Guiding Good Choices (GGC), which is an interactive five-week program designed to help parents enhance their family's resiliency and develop effective parenting skills.

OBJECTIVE 85 percent of the 80 GGC participants would complete the curriculum and report improved communication with their children.

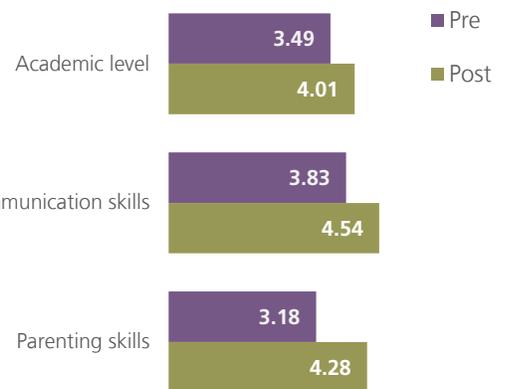
ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- **Exceeded target numbers:** 102 parents/caregivers participated in GGC.
- **Met outcome:** Participants reported improved communication and parenting skills, as well as improvement with their child's academics.

88% Parents indicated improvement in areas of family management and their child's behavior.

Figure 2

GGC participants rate parenting skills higher after participation



TOTAL = 102

NOTE: Significant at P < 0.05 level

SOURCE: VCC February 2018

The Gang Resistance Education and Training program

The primary prevention activity for VGRIP was Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.), which is designed for middle school aged youth, but for VGRIP it was implemented in 4th and 5th grade classrooms for 6 and 13 weeks, respectively, in five target elementary schools. The reason for this adaption was the concern that younger youth were at risk for gang involvement and a need to educate them earlier than middle school. The G.R.E.A.T. program is designed to increase youths' negative views of gangs, help youth gain the ability to handle conflict non-violently, and improve youths' comfort level with law enforcement. Implemented by trained Sheriff's Deputies, the program sought to reach a minimum of 650 4th graders and 650 5th graders.

OBJECTIVE 90 percent of the 650 4th graders and 650 5th graders receiving G.R.E.A.T. will report negative views of gangs, gain the ability to handle conflict non-violently, and an improved comfort level with law enforcement.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- **Met target numbers** 1,300 youth (759 4th graders and 541 5th graders) in the five target elementary schools participated in G.R.E.A.T.
- **Neutral outcome** There was little measurable change between pre- and post-surveys.

- Youth entered the program sharing the same views that G.R.E.A.T. espoused, leaving little room for change.
- Almost all (96%-99%) would tell someone if there was going to be a fight, would try to avoid a fight themselves, and did not plan to join a gang.
- Over three-quarters would reach out to police if they saw a crime (89%) and say "hello" to an officer if they saw one (77%).

Capturing Kids' Hearts

Capturing Kids' Hearts is a research-based curriculum geared toward training teachers in skills they can use to strengthen students' connectedness to school through enhancing protective factors (strong bonds with teachers, clear rules of conduct that are consistently enforced) and targeting modifiable risk factors (inappropriate behavior, poor social coping skills).

OBJECTIVE 32 staff and teachers would complete the Capturing Kids' Hearts program and 90 percent would report using the techniques learned in the training.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- **Exceeded target numbers:** 70 staff/teachers completed the training
- **Unknown if met outcome:** Participants' feedback upon completion of the class were all positive, and respondents touted how helpful the training was and expressed the desire for further training. As one participant noted, "I feel I have tools to use to build my class environment and encourage positive and correct behavior." Post implementation was not tracked.

Recreational activities

VGRIP offered recreational activities at the Linda Rhoades Community Center located in the heart of the Townsite neighborhood. Eight-week sports related recreational programs were offered five times a year for elementary, middle school-aged youth and high school youth.

OBJECTIVE 1,200 youth would attend recreation programs

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- **Exceeded target numbers:** 1,527 youth participated:

Community engagement

To improve community engagement in the Townsite neighborhood, Vista in partnership with North County Lifeline (NCL), planned to host a minimum of four community meetings or activities each year. These activities were intended to engage community members and former gang members in gang prevention and intervention activities, provide an opportunity for community members to share ideas and concerns, and help build a sense of community in the Townsite area.

OBJECTIVE 900 community residents will participate in community engagement activities, such as meetings and special events.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- **Exceeded target numbers:** 1,069 participants

Intervention components

Step-Up Mentoring

The Step-Up Mentoring program was designed to reach youth who were at risk of becoming involved in gangs. Adult mentors were assigned teen mentors (high school youth), who were in turn assigned to middle or elementary school mentees. The program incorporated two evidence-based curriculum: Second Step: A Violence Prevention Curriculum and Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS). The curricula were designed to reduce aggression and impulsive behavior.

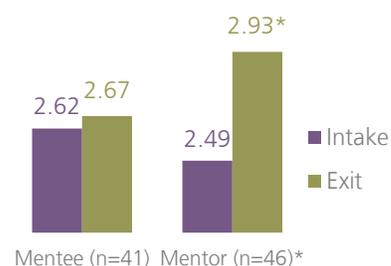
OBJECTIVE 80 percent of the 160 Step-Up mentoring participants will show improved school performance.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- **Almost met target numbers:** 156 high school mentors (58) and elementary and middle school mentees (98) participated in Step-Up, 86 percent of mentors and 76 percent of mentees successfully completed.
- **Partially met outcome:** One-half (50%) of mentors had a higher GPA at program exit, with significant improvement in total GPA. Over three-quarters (78%) of mentees increased their GPA from intake to exit, however the total GPA change was not significant.

Figure 3

Mentor's GPA increase significantly at exit



NOTE: Cases with missing information not included. *Significant at $P < 0.05$ level.

SOURCE: Step-Up Tracking Form, 2018

- Mentors and mentees participated in the program for about an average of 9 months (281 and 248 days, respectively).
- Mentees and mentors attended around three-quarters (77% and 71%, respectively) of their activities.
- Mentors experienced a significant increase in their GPA from intake to exit 2.49 ($SD=0.84$) to 2.93 ($SD=0.71$).

The Positive Action Program

Students from the target high schools who were identified as being involved or associated with gangs or exhibiting behavior problems were referred to the Positive Action (PA) program. Participants were in the program an average of 122.38 days ($SD=69$ days) and could receive case management services, individual mentoring, Trauma Incident Reduction (TIR), and/or therapeutic/psych-educational group treatment.

OBJECTIVE 70 percent of the 90 PA participants will increase risk and resilience scores, demonstrate increased academic achievement, and have no entry/re-entry into the juvenile justice system.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Almost met target numbers:** 79 youth participated in the program. The lower than anticipated number was because many of the higher risk youth were already on Probation, in-custody, or participating in other services. This situation was an unanticipated barrier and as a result, referring parties started to refer youth who were exhibiting behavior problems but not yet on Probation.
- Met outcomes:** Both a reduction in resiliency scores (indicating a reduced likelihood of recidivism) and the percent involved in juvenile justice system were achieved.

Intervention components

- Youth had a median number of 12.50 ($SD=8.27$) case management contacts and were in the program around four-months (122.38 days, on average).
- Almost nine out of ten (89%) youth received additional services, the most frequent being mental health (49%), gang intervention (33%), and/or life skills activities (31%).
- 81 percent successfully completed the program.

Figure 4

PA participants had a reduced risk of recidivating after program completion

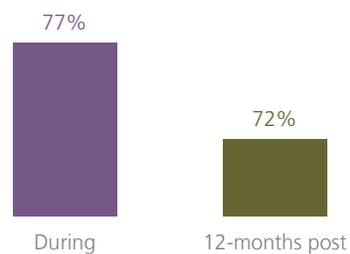


NOTE: Cases with missing information not included.
*Significant at $P < 0.05$ level.

SOURCE: PA Tracking Form, February 2018

Figure 5

Most PA participants remained crime free during and 12-months post-program



SOURCE: Probation Case Management System, 2018

Suppression components

Targeted law enforcement operations and updating of gang documentation

To address the more criminally active gang members and crime ridden areas, suppression or related operations were conducted by the Vista Sheriff's station and/or Probation Department. Targets were comprised of current probationers under the Gang Supervision Unit (GSU), crime "hot spots" and intelligence gathered by the Sheriff's gang unit. To support this effort, as well as provide current information to the intelligence arm of the gang unit, a 960-hour rehire (a retired Sheriff's Deputy) was employed by the Sheriff's Department to assist with gang documentation. This time-consuming work can take away from active investigations, surveillance, and operations, but is vital to ensuring that gang files are up-to-date and documentation is completed.

OBJECTIVE Provide one operation a month during the grant.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- **Exceeded target numbers** 268 operations were conducted, (an average of 7.4 a month), resulting in 560 arrests, including the seizure of 29 guns).

Figure 6

Suppression outcomes



Violent crime did decrease in the Townsite neighborhood

Overall, VGRIP did achieve its intended objectives, with result in the positive direction towards its primary goal of reducing gang involvement and activity in the Townsite area. Change in violent crime (i.e., a proxy of gang-related activity) three-years prior to the grant was compared to the three-years during the grant in the target area and in Vista. The results showed that while both the target area and Vista (with Townsite area not included) had decreases in violent crime during the grant period compared to prior years, the Townsite area experienced a greater decrease (19.81% versus 16.90%, respectively) (Figure 7). While the evaluation cannot show a correlation between the interventions and change in overall crime, the direction downward and the larger decrease in violent crimes in the target area compared to Vista is the outcome that VGRIP was striving for.

Figure 7

Violent crime decreased in the Townsite Area to a greater degree than Vista as whole



SOURCE: Vista Sherriff Substation, February 2018

Problems, adjustments, and lessons learned

As with any project, there are unexpected challenges and obstacles that arise, as well as valuable lessons learned from the entire process. Below is a list of the challenges, unintended successes, and lessons learned.

RELATIONSHIPS MATTER VGRIP was created in an environment where trust and understanding of each other's roles already existed. This milieu allowed the project from the start to focus on its objectives and not spend valuable energy creating and cultivating relationships. Receiving the grant enhanced, but did not create the collaborative environment.

CONDUCT SMALLER RATHER THAN LARGER OPERATIONS Probation shifted its method of conducting operations away from ones involving large number of officers to ones with smaller teams to increase frequency and reduce the "intimidation" factor. The intent was to facilitate positive interactions with probationers and their families.

REVISIT IMPLEMENTATION OF G.R.E.A.T. The intention of implementing G.R.E.A.T. in the lower grades was to reach youth sooner in their development in order to divert any future pull towards gang involvement. However, the evaluation results do not support the modification of G.R.E.A.T. from its intended audience (middle school) to elementary school. Furthermore, periodic monitoring of G.R.E.A.T. instruction is vital to ensure consistent delivery of the material. One recommendation is to implement a curriculum that has been created for a younger target audience.

DATA COLLECTION AND EVALUATION TASKS ARE TIME CONSUMING To offset some of the evaluation costs, program partners were responsible for most of the data collection. This data collection was a challenge because partners did not always have the time to gather the appropriate data nor the staff to enter it in a timely manner. This constraint led to more missing information than was desired, as well as extra efforts to clean the data that was provided. For future endeavors, it is recommended that a staff person be designated in the budget who is responsible for data collection at the program level.

Project description

Brief background

In 2014, Vista was a successful applicant for a three-year Board of State and Community Corrections, CalGRIP grant to build on gang prevention, intervention, and suppression activities in the City of Vista (Vista). The grant partners chose the SANDAG to conduct a process and outcome evaluation, including providing timely feedback for program partners to use in their on-going monitoring of the project. Vista, with a population of 101,659 individuals, is in the northern region of San Diego County (Map 1) and at the time of the grant application, it had a higher violent crime rate than the County average (4.67 per 1,000 compared to 3.66 per 1,000 population). There is one documented gang, the VHB, which claims Vista as their “territory” and a significant number of “outside” gang members living in Vista. VHB has been in Vista over five generations and has a connection with the Mexican Mafia, causing on-going concern for law enforcement and the community. At the beginning of the project there were 181 documented VHB gang members, another 100 that had not been documented¹, and approximately 100 affiliates. Law enforcement intelligence and high-profile gang-related shootings in the Townsite neighborhood of Vista were the precipitating reasons for the selection of Townsite as the target area. Contributing to this decision was vocal residents’ support of gang reduction efforts and the existing partnerships among the service programs, schools, law enforcement, and Vista, all of which prompted the submission of the CalGRIP application (i.e., VGRIP). The specific partners included:

- City of Vista (lead agency)
- San Diego County Sheriff’s Department – Vista Sheriff’s Station
- Vista Unified School District
- San Diego County Probation Department
- North County Lifeline (community-based organization)
- Vista Community Clinic
- SANDAG

Additional descriptive information about each of the partners is included in Appendix A, but it is important to note that all the entities have been collaborating on various gang prevention projects since 2008. Examples of the collaboration include the provision of prevention, intervention, and suppression activities for a prior 2010 CalGRIP grant in a neighboring area and participation in the North County Comprehensive Gang Initiative, the North County Gang Prevention and Intervention Committee, and the North County Gang Commission. This extensive history of partnering, along with the lengthy experience of working and serving the communities most impacted by gang violence, provided a solid foundation for the implementation of VGRIP.

¹ Documentation is a formal step of identifying an individual as being part of a street gang. Law enforcement use a minimum of three criteria (e.g., seen associating with known members, tattoos, admits being a member) to formally identify an individual as a member of a gang – either in the CalGang data base or in the Gang Units files.

Map 1
City of Vista



Overview of program components

Utilizing a multi-tier approach to address the gang problems, VGRIP employed the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Gang Model to implement prevention, intervention, and suppression activities. The specific activities were evidence-based, provided in both the community and the neighborhood schools to targeted youth and their families. Below is a brief description of each of the program elements separated by the target population (i.e., prevention, intervention, and suppression).

Prevention components

Guiding Good Choices

VCC offered GGC, which is an interactive five-week program designed to help parents enhance their family's protective processes and develop effective parenting skills. GGC has been identified as an effective program by the National Institute of Justice (CrimeSolutions.gov). The program is a training for parents of adolescent youth (i.e., middle school aged youth) and consists of five sessions, one of which is to be attended by the child. The parents receive four sessions of instruction, including material on the (a) identification of risk factors for adolescent substance abuse and a strategy to enhance family resiliency; (b) development of effective parenting practices, particularly regarding substance use issues; (c) family conflict management; and (d) use of family meetings as a vehicle for improving family management and positive child involvement. VCC had the goal to offer the program two times a year in Years 2 and 3 (sessions provided in Year 1 were funded through an existing CalGang grant).

The Gang Resistance Education and Training program

The primary prevention activity for VGRIP was G.R.E.A.T., which is also a promising program for gang prevention and has research documenting its success². The goals of the G.R.E.A.T. program are to increase negative views of gangs, gain the ability to handle conflict non-violently, and improve comfort level with law enforcement. Although G.R.E.A.T. is designed for middle school aged youth, the partners chose to offer the program at the elementary schools because of concerns by teachers that gangs were impacting younger youth. The G.R.E.A.T. program was implemented in 4th and 5th grade classrooms for 6 and 13 weeks, respectively, in the five target elementary schools (Olive, Foothill-Oak, Bobier, Maryland, and Grapevine). G.R.E.A.T. officers from the Sheriff's Department taught the program, administering five sessions from September 2015 to March 2017. The VGRIP grant's program manager worked closely with the participating schools to establish the G.R.E.A.T. calendar and scheduled the ten Sheriff's Deputies and eight probation officers to teach the curriculum. To become certified as G.R.E.A.T. instructors, officers received a two-week eight hours per day training.

² Finn, E.A., Peterson, D., Taylor, T.T and Osgood, D.W (2012). *Results from a Multi-Site Evaluation of the G.R.E.A.T. Program*. *Justice Quarterly*, 29, 125-151

Step-Up Mentoring

The Step-Up Mentoring program was designed to reach youth who were at risk of becoming involved in gangs. VCC was the partner responsible for managing this component. Relying on its relationship with the schools, college aged mentors were assigned teen mentors (high school youth), who were in turn assigned to middle or elementary school mentees. The program incorporated Second Step: A Violence Prevention Curriculum and Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS), both of which have been identified as effective programs by the National Institute of Justice (CrimeSolutions.gov). The curricula are designed to reduce aggressive and impulsive behavior, with PATHS targeting younger youth (elementary) and Second Step geared for middle school aged youth.

Capturing Kids' Hearts

Capturing Kids' Hearts is a research-based curriculum geared toward training teachers in skills they can use to strengthen students' connectedness to school through enhancing protective factors (strong bonds with teachers, clear rules of conduct that are consistently enforced) and targeting modifiable risk factors (inappropriate behavior, poor social coping skills). The training was provided by curricula developers to teachers in eleven schools in the Vista Unified School District. Trust built from prior collaboration between the schools and community partners and the Vista facilitated the offering of the program as part of the project.

Community engagement

To improve community engagement in the Townsite neighborhood, Vista, in partnership with NCL, planned to host a minimum of four community meetings or activities each year. These activities were intended to engage community members and former gang members in gang prevention and intervention activities, provide an opportunity for community members to share ideas and concerns, and help build a sense of community in the Townsite area. Suggestions for specific topics and presenters were gathered at the quarterly VGRIP partner's meetings, with the VGRIP grant project manager (a City of Vista staff member) and NCL making the final decision and handling the logistics. NCL drew upon its own programs and its network of partners to recruit and invite participants.

Recreational activities

As part of the VGRIP's comprehensive approach, pro-social activities were also offered in the community. Specifically, recreational activities were provided at the Linda Rhoades Community Center located in the heart of the Townsite neighborhood. The 8-week programs for elementary school-aged youth were offered five times a year during daytime hours, as well as in the evenings, with Friday evenings targeting middle school-aged youth and Saturday evenings intended for high school youth.

Intervention components

The Positive Action Program

Students from the target high schools (i.e., Alta Vista and Major General Murray High School) who were identified as being involved or associated with gangs were referred to North County Lifeline's NCL Positive Action program (PA). Referrals also could come from Probation, the Sheriff's Department, or other community partners. During program participation, youth could receive case management services, individual mentoring, Trauma Incident Reduction (TIR), and therapeutic/psych-educational group treatment. TIR, an evidence-based mental health treatment modality that requires a certified therapist, focuses on behavioral interventions that reduce the re-experience of traumatic situations. Based on individual needs, participants may have received one or more of the following evidence-based curricula: PA (builds resilience and pro-social behaviors through character and empathy development), Reducing the Risk (teaches sexual/reproductive health, positive relationships, decision making and refusal skills), Seeking Safety (helps improve coping skills and prevent relapse), and My Life, My Choice (provides gender-specific curriculum for girls focused on increasing resiliency and self-esteem). In addition, participants in PA had access to the plethora of services provided by NCL, which included wraparound resources, substance abuse services, and family supports.

Suppression components

Targeted law enforcement operations

To address the more criminally active gang members and crime ridden areas, suppression or related operations were conducted by the Sheriff's and/or Probation Department. Scheduling of individual and joint operations was the responsibility of the Sergeant/Supervisor for the respective team. Targets were comprised of current probationers under the Gang Suppression Unit (GSU) supervision, crime "hot spots" as detected by the Vista Sheriff's gang unit, and intelligence gathered from the Sheriff's GSU.

Updating of gang documentation

Of importance to the Sheriff was the opportunity this grant provided to catch up on the backlog of documentation and purging of gang related information and intelligence. This time-consuming work can take away from active investigations, surveillance, and operations, but is vital to ensuring that gang files are up-to-date and documentation is complete for intelligence purposes. To address this need, a retired Sheriff's Deputy (a retired Sheriff's Deputy allowed to return and work a total of 960 hours) was brought in to assist with gang documentation (including CalGangs updates) and intelligence gathering.

Goal and objectives

Based on a recognized need to address gang activity by law enforcement, Vista, and community partners, the goal of VGRIP was to reduce gang involvement through targeted prevention intervention, and suppression efforts. To accomplish this goal, VGRIP proposed eight objectives that had measurable outcomes.

1. 85 percent of the 80 (40/Yr2; 40/Yr3) **GUIDING GOOD CHOICES** participants will complete the curriculum and report improved communication with their children.
2. 90 percent of the 650 4th graders (150/Yr1; 250/Yr2; 250/Yr3) and 650 5th graders (150/Yr1; 250/Yr2; 250/Yr3) receiving **G.R.E.A.T.** will report negative views of gangs, gain the ability to handle conflict non-violently, and report an improved comfort level with law enforcement.
3. 80 percent of the 160 (40/Yr1; 60/Yr2; 60/Yr3) **STEP-UP MENTORING** participants will show improved school performance and have no school disciplinary actions.
4. 70 percent of the 90 (30 per year) **POSITIVE ACTION PROGRAM** participants will increase risk and resilience scores, demonstrate increased academic achievement, and have no entry/re-entry in the juvenile justice system.
5. 32 staff and teachers will complete the **CAPTURING KIDS' HEARTS** program, and 90 percent will report using the techniques learned in the training.
6. 1,200 youth (300/Yr1; 450/Yr2; 450/Yr3) will attend **RECREATION PROGRAMS**.
7. 900 (300 per year) community residents will participate in **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES**, such as meetings and special events.
8. One **SUPPRESSION** or other related operations (e.g., 4th waiver searches, targeted patrols) will be conducted monthly.

The widespan of the objectives reflects both the complexity of gang violence in the community and the collaborative approach to address the problem from multiple angles and levels. The VGRIP approach can be viewed as a continuum of actions to address the most immediate to future gang challenges. This includes halting the most visible and pressing gang activity (e.g., suppression operations), redirecting those who are immediately at-risk of joining gangs, to planting seeds and building skills to prevent future participation (school and parent programming).

Methodology

Research design

As reflected in the eight objectives, VGRIP targeted a range of community members including students, families, residents, and justice involved individuals through diverse programming and activities. Because of this variation, the evaluation was designed to capture the totality of efforts by utilizing a multi-method design. Specifically, to determine the success VGRIP had in achieving its goal and objectives, a mixed-methods, pre-post design was employed to measure change over time among participants (when appropriate) and change in crime for the target areas. For individual measures (e.g., recidivism) a pre-post, treatment-only group design was used and for aggregate data (such as overall crime rates), changes in violent crime in the target area during the grant period was compared to three years prior, as well as in the other areas of Vista. To conserve resources directed toward the evaluation, most of the data collection was completed by program partners.

The evaluation was designed with the principles of “Action Research” driving the design. SANDAG research staff members were key partners in the collaborative process and charged with providing timely and valid data to inform the ongoing assessment of the project and allow the collaborative to make any mid-course adjustments.

Examples of how the evaluation assumed a more “action” orientation included:

- SANDAG and the partners worked together on the development of the Local Action Plan, to ensure that the evaluation provided the partners with pertinent information to determine if their interventions were appropriate and on target, to ensure that the proposed data collection was feasible, and to gain valuable input on instrument development in an effort to increase the likelihood of capturing valid information (especially when creating the surveys for the youth).
- SANDAG attended all collaborative meetings to gain a rich understanding of VGRIP’s evolution, to build trusting relationships that supported access to valuable data, and to be able to interpret the data from a more informed position.
- SANDAG analyzed and summarized data throughout the project, which was used to adjust programming (i.e., G.R.E.A.T.).

Process evaluation

To determine if VGRIP was implemented as planned and reached its target population, and to document any challenges or changes that occurred, SANDAG conducted a process evaluation and focused on addressing the following research questions:

1. What were the number and characteristics of the program participants, including demographics and criminal history (when applicable)?
2. What was the level and type of services received, including contacts, attendance, and pro-social activities?
3. What factors were related to successful completion of the program?
4. How many and what type of community and recreational activities were conducted and how well were they attended?

5. How many suppression operations occurred in the target areas during the project period? How many arrests took place as a result of the operations?
6. How many trainings were conducted, including the type and number of participants?
7. What did the program partners perceive as the programs' strengths and areas of improvement?

Outcome evaluation

In addition to the process evaluation, SANDAG conducted an outcome evaluation to answer the question of how effective the model was in accomplishing its goal of reducing gang violence in the target area. To assess how well and with whom did VGRIP work, the outcome evaluation addressed the following questions:

1. Did participants remain crime-free during the program and 12-months post-program participation?
2. How did violent crime and gang-related crime change in the target area in terms of nature and amount?
3. Did the community perceive any change in gang activity and gang-related crime in the target area?
4. Did youths' attitudes and behaviors about gangs change as a result of participating in programs?
5. Did communication between parent and child improve after participation in GGC?

Data collection

To address the process and outcome research questions, data were gathered from multiple sources.

Intake form Because those programs (PA, Step-Up Mentoring) providing individual level services each had their own agency intake form, SANDAG created an Excel file with common data variables (e.g., age, race, gender) that the programs populated and sent to SANDAG, along with the treatment data described below.

School data For Step-Up Mentoring, participant's attendance, grades, and school behavior data were gathered by the program at intake and exit and transferred electronically to SANDAG for analysis.

Pre/post surveys To measure change in knowledge and attitudes over time, pre- and post-surveys were administered for several of the VGRIP programs (i.e., G.R.E.A.T., Step-Up). The topics varied slightly by program but did include one or more of the following: measures of change in attitudes and behaviors towards gangs, school engagement, delinquent behaviors, and family relations. The hard copies of the surveys were provided to SANDAG for data entry, cleaning, and analysis.

Archival data collection Individual-level criminal history data were collected by research staff one year prior to and up to 12-months post-program participation for PA participants. Data were gathered from the Probation Case Management System (Probation referrals and true findings).

Crime data Most of the outcomes were individual based; however, VGRIP as a whole was intended to reduce gang-related crime in the target area. To measure overall change in gang-related crime over time, data were gathered three years prior to and during the project. Initially two types of crime data were to be collected to approximate “gang-related” crime; one was any crime that was flagged by officers as related to person either in a gang or affiliated in a gang, whether or not the crime benefited the gang itself, and the other was Uniform Crime Report (UCR) Part I violent crimes. However, upon further review of the data and feedback from the Vista Sherriff’s gang sergeant, what was being defined and flagged as “gang-related” was not always defined or reported consistently, especially in beats that are not patrolled by gang unit officers. Given the lack of reliability and validity associated with “gang” labeled crimes, the decision was made to only track violent crime as a proxy for measuring change in crime in the area. The Sheriff’s Department provided the data to SANDAG.

Service tracking form SANDAG worked with PA and Step-Up Mentoring program staff to create a user-friendly Excel form to track the type and dosage of services received by program participants. Program partners also tracked the number and type of community events, along with the number of people who attended each event.

Listening sessions with community members To garner input from the community about their perception of any changes in gang-related activity and crime, two listening sessions with community members were planned during Year 3 of the grant. However, Vista’s grant project manager had significant difficulty gathering participants. Despite numerous attempts, only individuals whose children were participants in either PA (n=4) or Step-Up Mentoring (n=5) agreed to participate. The first session was held in Spanish and conducted by SANDAG and the second was conducted by the Vista’s grant project manager and involved a group of three and interviews with two other parents. Because of the limited number of participants and the availability of only participants’ parents, the information provided did not address the entire breadth of the research question – which is noted later in the report.

Survey of partners To solicit information about program implementation, what worked, and what could be improved, a survey of key program staff was administered. The survey was created in collaboration with Vista grant project manager and was administered electronically, using SurveyMonkey, twice over the course of the project. The first survey was used to inform mid-course program adjustments and the second provided an overall assessment of VGRIP.

Suppression operations Law enforcement used a standardized Excel form to document the outcomes of suppression operations, including type of contacts (i.e., 4th wavier search, warrant), reason for contact, gang affiliation, weapons and drugs seized, and arrests.

960 Hire To capture the efforts of the 960 hire, the officer entered the different types of documentation, including renewal and purging of gang members in the CalGangs database, and additional intelligence provided to the gang unit. Data were sent quarterly to SANDAG for summarization.

VGRIP participants and level of involvement

What were the number and characteristics of the program participants, including demographics and criminal history (when applicable)? What was the level and type of services received, including contacts, attendance, and pro-social activities. What factors were related to successful completion of the program?

The four VGRIP components that provided individualized services were GGC, G.R.E.A.T., Step-Up Mentoring, and PA. Overall these four programs served 1,558 youth and families over the course of the grant (Table 1).

Guiding Good Choices (Prevention)

Over the course of the grant, VCC conducted five GGC sessions, involving 102 parents/caregivers, which exceeded its goal of 80. Three classes were held in 2016 and two in 2017. All participants successfully completed the program, with 71 percent attending all five sessions and 29 percent attending four out of five.

Table 1

Individuals served by VGRIP

Participants served by VGRIP prevention programs	
Guiding Good Choices	102 parents/caregivers
G.R.E.A.T.	1,300 4th and 5th graders
Step Up Mentoring	156 (58 mentors/98 mentees)
Positive Action program	79 at-risk youth
Total prevention participants	1,558

NOTE: Cases with missing information not included.

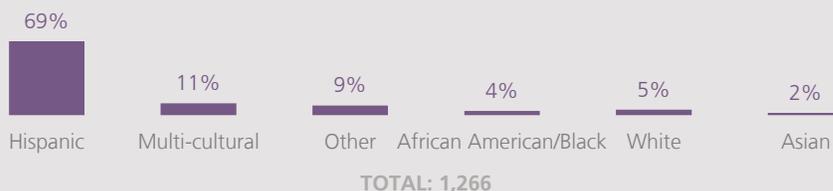
SOURCE: SANDAG, VGRIP tracking forms, 2018

G.R.E.A.T. (Prevention)

Implemented at five target schools, in six 4th grade and five 5th grade classes, a total of 759 4th graders and 541 5th graders received the curriculum. While the split among grade level was not an equal 650 as proposed in its objective, the program did meet the overall objective of serving 1,300 youth. Analyses showed that there were no significant differences in demographics between the two grades and so data are reported together. The majority (69%) of students identified as Hispanic with a similar proportion of girls and boys participating (49% and 51%, respectively) (Figure 1).

Figure 1

The majority students participating in G.R.E.A.T. were Hispanic



NOTE: Cases with missing information not included.

SOURCE: Pre-and Post- G.R.E.A.T. surveys, 2016 – 2017

49% girls

51% boys

Participated in G.R.E.A.T.

Step-Up Mentoring (Prevention)

Step-Up Mentoring linked college-aged mentors³ from the local community colleges to teen mentors (high school youth at the target schools), who in turn were assigned to middle or elementary school youth (again attending target schools). Both student mentors and mentees received services while involved in the program, with mentees able to progress to mentors when they enter high school. The program came close to meeting its objective of serving 160 youth by enrolling 58 student mentors and 98 mentees, for a total of 156 youth. Around two-thirds (68%) of mentees were male and 10.68 years old on average ($SD=1.74$), with just over one-half attending middle school (57%) and 43 percent in elementary school (grades 1st to 5th). The average GPA at intake for mentees in middle school⁴ was 2.49 ($SD=0.90$). Almost all mentees reported their ethnicity as Hispanic (96%), with only 1 percent each reporting their ethnicity as White, Black/African-American, Asian/Pacific Islands, or Other. As expected, mentors were older (16.32 years old on average; $SD=1.32$), attending high school (38% in 12th, 30% in 11th, 20% in 10th, and 13% in 9th), and had a similar average GPA of 2.41 ($SD=0.90$). Mentors were more likely female (60%) and slightly more racially diverse (Figure 2A and 2B).

Participants served by VGRIP intervention programs

156 youth mentees/mentors

Step-Up Mentoring

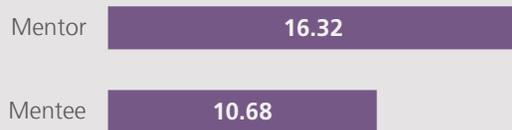
79 at-risk youth

Positive Action program

TOTAL = 235

Figure 2A

Age of mentee and mentors

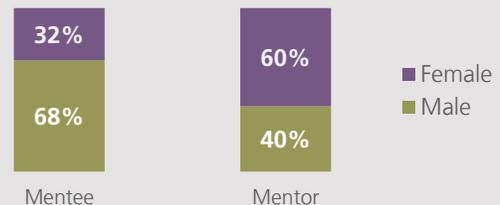


TOTAL = 58-98

SOURCE: Step-Up Tracking Form, 2018

Figure 2B

Gender makeup of mentee and mentors

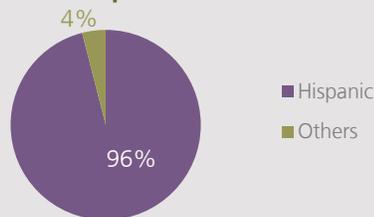


TOTAL = 58-98

SOURCE: Step-Up Tracking Form, 2018

Figure 3A

Most mentees were Hispanic



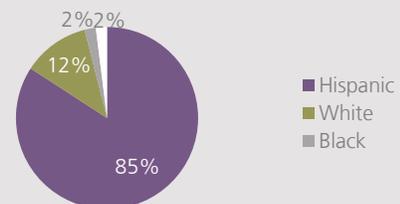
TOTAL = 97

NOTE: Cases with missing information not included.

SOURCE: Step-Up Tracking Form, 2018

Figure 3B

Most mentors were Hispanic



TOTAL = 52

NOTE: Cases with missing information not included.

SOURCE: Step-Up Tracking Form, 2018

³ Data are only presented for the youth mentors and mentees, as information on the college-aged youth were not tracked.

⁴ Elementary schools do not provide GPAs.

On average, around three-quarters of mentors (71%; $SD=0.27$) and mentees (77%; $SD=0.25$) attended their planned sessions and participated in the program a median of 246 days (range 31 – 730) and 280 median days (range 31-858, respectively). Among mentees, gender was related to level of attendance, with males significantly more likely to attend (82%; $SD=.19$) than females (66%; $SD=.31$).

Except for home visits, data were only tracked at the group level, rather than individually. Step-Up Mentoring provided 945 events, groups, outreach, and/or contacts with participants, most of which were in the form of groups (i.e., mentoring or Step-Up meetings) or personal contacts (i.e., home visits, school visits) (Table 2). In addition, the majority of mentees (77%) received at least one home visit (range 1 to 8) (not shown).

Table 2

Step-Up mentee and mentor activities

Activity type	Number
Group or regular mentoring group	419
Phone calls	126
Home visits	119
Field trip	105
School outreach	72
Step-Up group meetings	69
Other	25
Parent event	8
School visit	2
Total	945

SOURCE: Step-Up Tracking Form, 2018

During the grant period, the program changed how it defined “successful” program completion, from a definition based on change in GPA and attitudes toward gangs, to one based on attending at least 80 percent of the activities. According to program records, 76 percent of the mentees and 86 percent of the mentors successfully completed the program. Demographic information, GPA, attitude towards gangs, or length in program were not found to be related to success. School disciplinary actions also were tracked to measure change in behaviors. However, only five participants had any documented disciplinary actions at intake (range 1 to 3) and only two did so at exit (1 each). Analysis of mentees who had a pre- and post-GPA, showed no significant change in average GPA from intake to exit (2.62; $SD=0.82$ to 2.67; $SD=0.84$) but, mentors did experience a significant increase from an average GPA of 2.49 ($SD=0.84$) to 2.93 ($SD=0.71$).

76% mentees
86% mentors
successfully completed the Step-Up Mentoring program

Positive Action program (Intervention)

A total of 79 at-risk youth participated in PA over the course of the grant (11 off from NCL’s goal of 90).⁵ As with the other VGRIP programs, the largest proportion of participants were male (84%) and almost all (99%) were Hispanic. The average age was 13.89 years old ($SD=2.08$) and most youth were in high school (54%), followed by middle (37%), and elementary (9%) school (Figure 4). PA was intended as an intervention for youth at-risk of joining gangs and with 92.2 percent having some gang affiliation and a median SDRRC score that fell within the highest risk level (-21.00; range -43 to 33)⁶ the program was reaching its target audience.

Youth were engaged in the program an average of 122.38 days ($SD=69.07$), and had an average of 12.50 ($SD=8.27$) case management contacts during their time in the program (Figure 5). Eight out of ten (81%) youth exited the program successfully, with no statistical differences by demographics or intake risk level. In addition to case management, around nine out of 10 youth (89%) received additional services. Those youth that did receive additional supports, on average s/he received 2.25 ($SD=1.42$) services. The most common type being a mental health group or meeting (49%), followed by a gang-related intervention (33%) and/or a life skills program (31%) (Table 3). To be expected, those that successfully exited the program had more case management contacts (13.30; $SD=8.51$) and days in the program (138.41; $SD=64.90$) than those that did not (9.13; $SD=6.30$ add 54.0 days; $SD=37.96$, respectively).

Table 3

Positive Action provided a variety of services

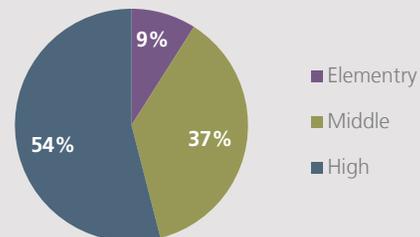
Type of programming	Percent received	Average hours attended
Mental health	49.25%	6.09 (SD=4.17)
Gang intervention	32.84%	6.62 (SD=4.86)
Life skills	31.34%	13.24 (SD=12.86)
Anger management	22.39%	7.83 (SD=2.87)
Empowerment group	14.93%	6.90 (SD=3.67)
Mentor group	14.93%	9.35 (SD=7.73)
Wrap around	11.90%	0.68 (SD=0.68)
Alcohol or drug	11.94%	6.25 (SD=2.06)
Parenting group	8.96%	6.50 (SD=4.82)
Educational support	7.46%	4.00 (SD=0.00)
Other	19.40%	5.34 (SD=9.06)

13.89 years old

average age of PA participants

Figure 4

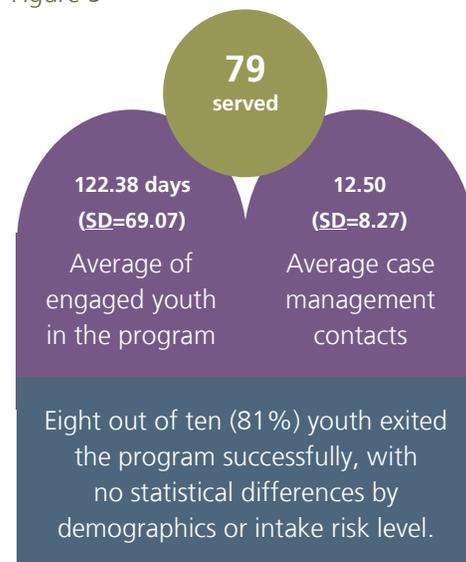
Grade of Positive Action Program participants



TOTAL = 79

SOURCE: NCL Intake Forms

Figure 5



⁵ PAP staff noted that it was harder to reach the target numbers because higher risk participants were on formal probation, in custody, or already participating in other services. More success was found with youth who were starting to display behaviors related to gang behavior and affiliation

⁶ SDRRC resiliency scores range from a low of -60 to a high of 60, with the risk of recidivating grouped into for levels (-60 -0 Intensive; 1-17 High; 18 - 40 Med; and 41-60 Low).

How many and what type of community and recreational activities were conducted and how well were they attended?

To support community engagement in the Townsite area, Vista and NCL worked closely to host forums on relevant and timely topics on gangs and risky behaviors. Possible topics were discussed at the quarterly VGRIP partner meetings and then Vista’s grant project manager and NCL made the final decision on topics. Outside partners conducted the forums and NCL relied on its wide net of contacts (individual and agency wide) to advertise the events to the community. From March 2015 to June 2017, NCL offered 17 different forums on topics such as gangs, human trafficking, and drugs. Each forum was around 2.5 hours on average and involved a total of 1,069 attendees, both adults and youth. These numbers exceed their goal to reach 300 residents a year, for a total of 900 over the three-year project period.

Another prevention strategy for the larger community was to provide pro-social activities for the youth in the neighborhood, both during the day (for younger children), in the evening (for middle school aged youth), and on Saturdays for older, high school aged youth. During the course of the grant, Vista provided 1,207 recreational activity hours involving 1,527 youth (exceeding the objective of reaching 1,200 youth). The specific types of events were all sports-related, including indoor and outdoor soccer, dodgeball, softball, and kickball. The first event took place on September 2014 and the last in September 2017, with events occurring after school, on weekends, and in the summer.

Community/recreational activities

17
community activities

1,069
community attendees

1,207
recreation hours

1,527
recreational youth

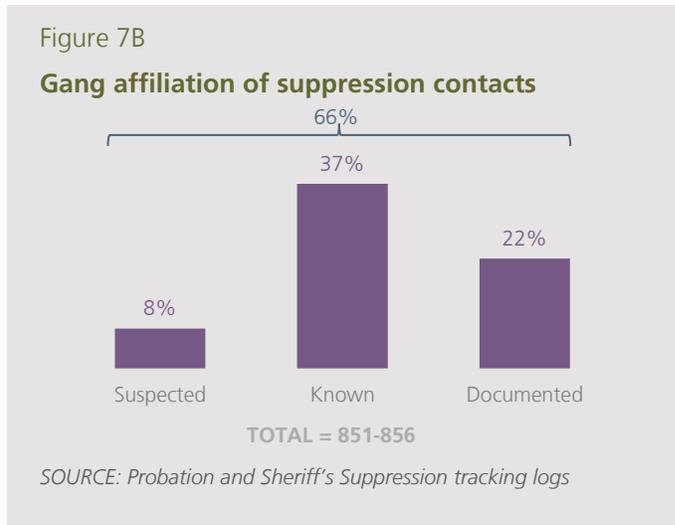
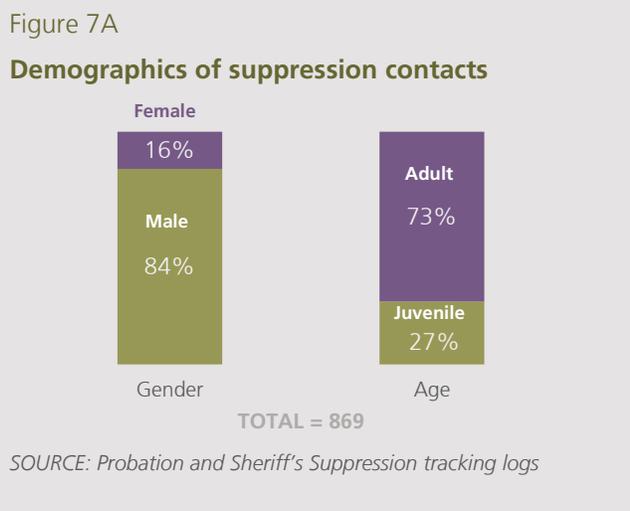
How many suppression operations occurred in the target area during the project period? How many arrests took place as a result of the operations?

The Vista Sheriff’s station utilized a two-prong approach to target the highest risk individuals (i.e., those currently active in the gang life). The primary approach was conducting targeted suppression activities and the second was improving the backlog of documentation on current and past gang involved individuals. The suppression operations were conducted in collaboration with officers from Probation’s Gang Supervision Unit (GSU) and the targets included both individuals of interest and geographic areas. Target selection was based on current probationers under GSU supervision and recent “hot spots” of gang activity. Operations were conducted jointly, as well as separately by each of the agencies, with Probation handling most of the 4th waiver compliance checks and the Sheriff’s department conducting the surveillance and patrol operations.

From April 2015 through December 2017, Probation and the Sheriff conducted 268 operations involving 869 individuals, and the majority were male (84%) and adult (73%) (Figure 7A). The number of operations far exceeded the planned one per month, with Probation opting to go out several times per month using smaller teams as opposed to larger ones. Probation believed the smaller and more frequent team approach was less intimidating to families, facilitated more meaningful and positive dialogue with the youth/adults and their families, and allowed probation officers to follow-up on previously discussed goals and directives. Over one-half (54%) of the individuals contacted were under probation supervision and 4 percent each were on parole or Post Release Community Supervision (PRCS) (not shown)⁷. Consistent with the intent of the operations, the majority (66%) of the contacts involved individuals who had some level of gang affiliation (Figure 7B).

“A search warrant was served on this VHB gang member who was selling heroin out of his residence. The search resulted in the seizure of heroin. One small child was removed from the residence and taken into protective custody.”
Officer field note 8/10/16 operation

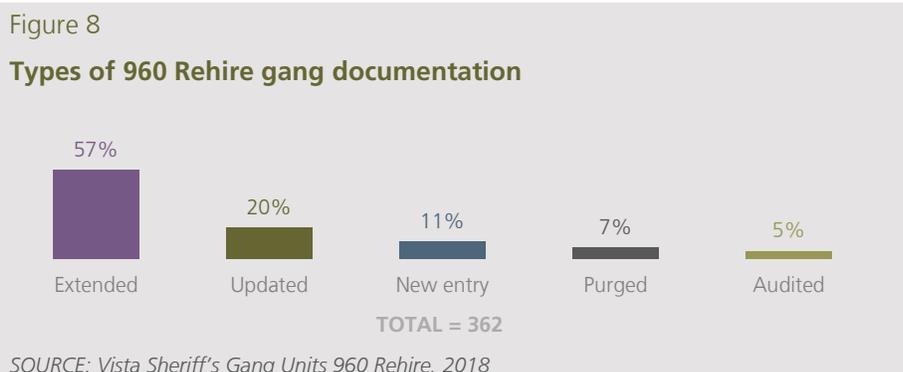
Figure 6
Suppression outcomes



⁷ PRCS offenders were formally supervised by state parole, but with the passage of AB 109 in 2011 the responsibility for the supervision was shifted to local counties.

These suppression efforts resulted in an arrest 64 percent of the time (560 arrests) and included the seizure of a weapon in 8 percent of those arrests including 29 guns. The arrests also resulted in the confiscation of illicit drugs in 25 percent of cases, with one-half (51%) involving the seizure of methamphetamine and 20 percent heroin.

As noted earlier, VGRIP also allowed the Vista Sheriff’s station to hire a retired deputy to address the backlog of intelligence and information on gangs. Most of the rehire’s time (79%) was spent reviewing gang files and making updates to the State’s CalGang database. As a result of his efforts, over half (57%) of the cases reviewed were extended, 20 percent had new information updated in the file to maintain the documentation, 11 percent were a new entry into the system, 7 percent were purged, and 5 percent were audits (Figure 8). In addition, to reviewing gang files, the rehire also assisted GSU officers (or in one case a judge) in investigative work (5% of the time), with the remaining time spent supporting administrative needs (11%) for the unit or in trainings (4%) (not shown).



How many trainings were conducted, including the type and number of participants?

Capturing Kids’ Hearts was the primary training conducted under the VGRIP project. Following the prescribed curriculum and presented by facility from the Flippen Group (creators of the curriculum), two separate trainings were held in June 2016 and June 2017. The multi-day trainings involved a total of 76 teachers, from eleven schools in the target area. Comments from participants who completed a post-survey were overwhelmingly positive and using a scale of 1 to 4, with four being the highest, they rate the usefulness of the training a 3.90 (SD=.29) on average. Comments on the feedback form congealed around a common theme of successfully providing teachers tools to better manage their classrooms and build productive relationship with students.

“I feel I have tools to use to build my class environment and encourage and correct behavior.”

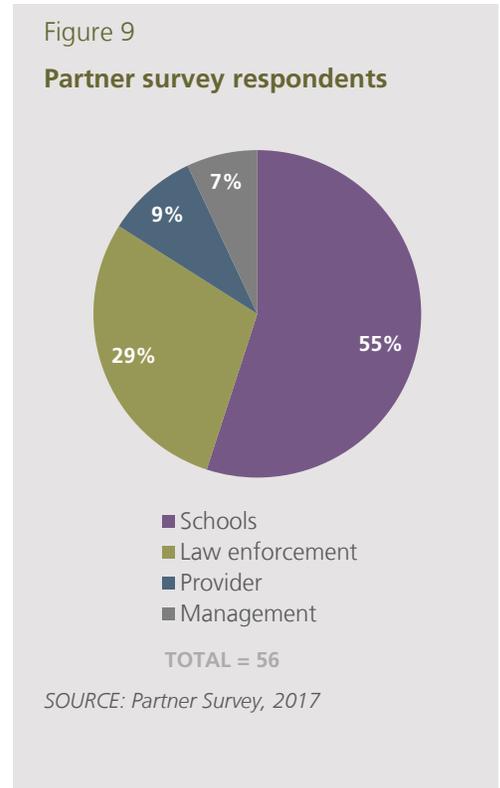
Capturing Kids’ Hearts
Post-survey, June 2017

What did the program partners perceive as the programs' strengths and areas of improvement?

As noted earlier, the evaluation was designed to facilitate a feedback loop for the partners. To achieve this goal a partner survey was distributed at two points in time. The first survey was distributed electronically using SurveyMonkey in October 2016 to 127 respondents representing each of the partners (schools, law enforcement, community providers, and Vista), of which 56 responded (44% response rate). The primary purpose of the first survey was to provide Vista and VGRIP partners with timely information to make any programmatic adjustments. Because of the survey, G.R.E.A.T. was examined more closely to address the lack of change from the pre- and post-survey analysis and the schools explored the feasibility of expanding Capturing Kids' Hearts because of how well it was received. The results of this survey were analyzed and summarized in a written report for the partners and is attached in Appendix B.

The second survey was distributed (also using Survey Monkey) in June 2017, to 109 partners, with 56 respondents (51% response rate). Most of the respondents were from the schools (55%), followed by law enforcement (29%), the management team (7%) and community service providers (9%) (Figure 9).

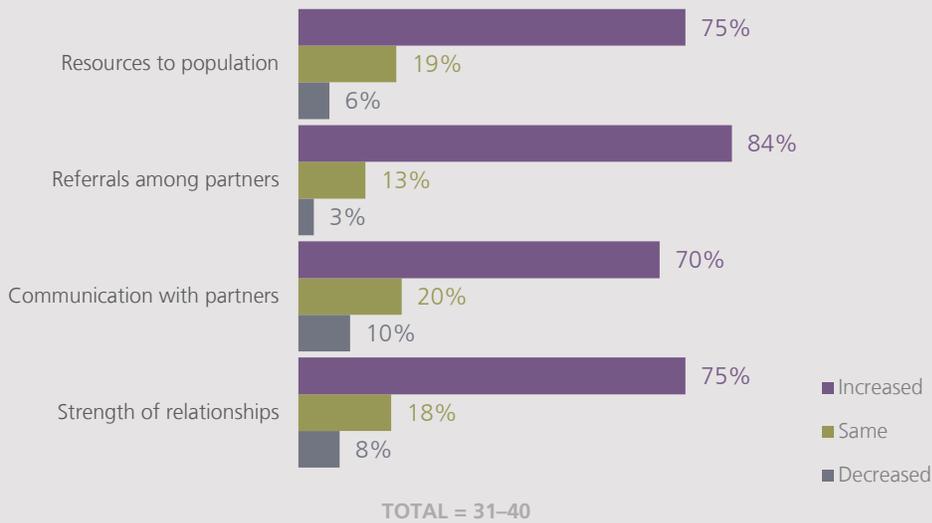
The survey was designed to gather feedback on each program component, as well as VGRIP overall. Because questions about each program were limited to those who had direct knowledge of the specific program, the number of responses were small (from a low of 2 for PA and a high of 36 for G.R.E.A.T.) and were intended to inform the program, not the evaluation, the results are located in the Appendix. To address the evaluation question of how partners felt about VGRIP, respondents were asked to rate the City's management of VGRIP, the effects VGRIP had on the partnerships and their ability to serve the target population. As illustrated in Figure 10, partners' felt that VGRIP increased the strength and communication of their working relationships, as well as the resources available to the youth and family they served (70% to 75% reported increases). These results align with the underlying principles of VGRIP, which sought to reduce gang activity by leveraging the existing resources in the community through improved partnerships and collaboration. These marks also correlate with the majority (82%) of respondents reporting that they planned to continue to work with the VGRIP partners after the grant ends (not shown).



“Youth, schools, and families in our Vista community have been greatly impacted by the services provided by the programs funded through CalGRIP.”
Partner survey respondent – service provider

Figure 10

Respondents' opinion on VGRIP's effect on the partnerships



NOTE: Cases with missing information not included.

SOURCE: Partner Survey, 2017

The responses to the survey questions inquiring about the management of VGRIP were consistent with the perceived outcomes. More than nine out of ten (91 – 100%) respondents reported that VGRIP management promoted communication, feedback, and accountability (Table 3). Worthy of noting is that during the grant period there was staff turnover at Vista (promotion and retirement), which resulted in three different grant project managers; however, these high marks are testament to the care in transitioning staff in a manner that did not negatively impact the project.

Table 3

Respondent's view of VGRIP management

VGRIP project management has...	Agree/strongly agree
clearly communicated expectations	92%
listened to partners' feedback	100%
held partners accountable	91%
encouraged relationship building among partners	100%
Total	34-38

NOTE: Cases with missing information not included.

SOURCE: Partner Survey, June 2017

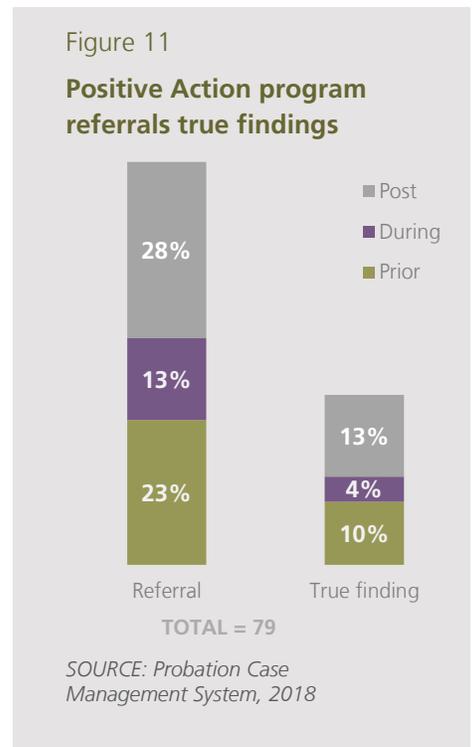
VGRIP outcomes

Did participants remain crime-free during the program and 12-months post program participation?

As noted earlier, PA was the evidence-based program selected to provide intervention to high-risk youth (e.g., those already affiliated with or hanging out with gang members). Recidivism included referrals to probation (which is a proxy for arrest) and true findings (i.e., found to be “guilty” of the offense). As noted earlier, upon entering the program, around one in four (23%) of participants had a prior referral to probation, with 10 percent (or 8 youth) having a prior true finding (Figure 11)⁸ Analysis of crime activity showed that 77 percent of participants during the grant period and 72 percent of participants 12-months post-program participation remained crime-free, achieving PA’s objective of having 70 percent remain crime-free.

Deeper analysis showed that during program participation, 13 percent of participants had a referral, with 4 percent (or 3 youth) having a true finding (Figure 11). Of the 10 youth who received a referral while in the program, three were for property or other crime, followed by violent crimes (2), and drug and status offenses (1 each). Half of all the referrals (5) occurred at the felony level, followed by four at the misdemeanor-level, and one was a status offense. There were no significant differences on the likelihood of receiving a referral by gender, risk level, gang affiliation, or whether the participant successfully completed the program.

Analysis of criminal activity 12-months post program participation revealed an increase in both referrals to probation (28%) and true findings (13%) (Figure 11). Referral types were equally distributed by violent, property, and drug/alcohol offenses (5% each), with “other” (11%) being the most likely charge and a status offense being the least likely (1%). Most of the referrals were at the misdemeanor level (40%), followed by felonies (32%), with the remaining being infractions (23%) and status level (1%). Of the 10 youth who had a true finding in the post period, most were for a violent offense (6), followed by a property (2), and one each for drugs/alcohol or “other” offense. Felony true findings constituted six out of ten, with four at the misdemeanor-level.



⁸ However, because of legislative changes in 2016, which require juvenile cases to sealed immediately after completion, there could have been additional charges that were not documented.

Because of the uncertainty associated with the sealing of cases and therefore possible missed contacts with the system, significance tests were not conducted between pre- and post-periods. Analysis that were performed did not reveal any relationship between the likelihood of receiving a referral and a youth’s gender, risk level, gang affiliation, completion status, or if the youth had a referral in the during time period.

Additional outcome measures included changes in risk scores between pre-and post-program participation⁹. As Figure 12 shows, overall SDRRC resilience scores improved significantly from entry (-21.86, SD=13.95) to exit (-17.04, SD=16.64), indicating improved protective factors and a decrease in risk areas. Youth who successfully completed the program had an average increase of 6.23 in their scores (SD=9.88), while the scores of those who exited unsuccessfully decreased by an average of change -2.91 (SD=5.45) indicating increased risk of recidivism (not shown).

Figure 12

PA participants reduce risk for recidivating after program completion



NOTE: Cases with missing information not included. *Significant at P <0.05 level.

SOURCE: ETO, April 1, 2017

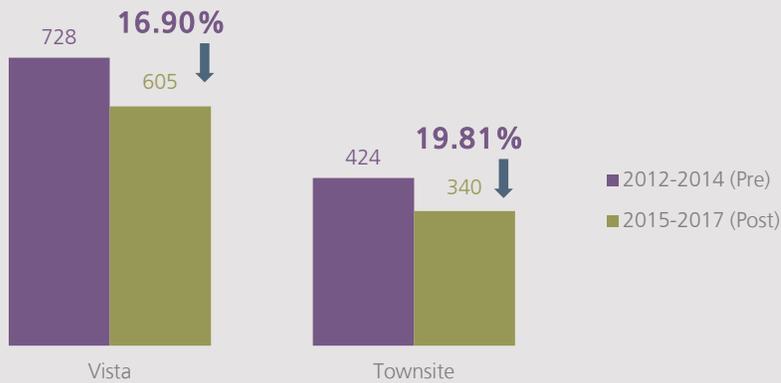
How did violent crime and gang-related crime change in the target area in terms of nature and amount?

As previously noted, the inconsistency in documenting “gang-related” crime prohibited using the original evaluation design to compare change in “gang-related” crime over time and between the target area and the Vista as a whole. As a secondary measure, changes in Part I, UCR violent crimes (i.e., aggravated assault, rape, robbery, and homicide) that occurred in the Townsite area three-years prior to the start of VGRIP (2012 -2014) were compared to those reported during the grant period (2015-2017) and the changes were also compared to Vista alone (without the Townsite beats included). As Figure 13 shows, Vista and the target area had less violent crime reported during the grant period compared to three years prior (728 to 605 and 424 to 340, respectively). However, the Townsite area experienced a larger decrease in violent crime during this period (19.81% decrease compared to 16.90%).

⁹ The original design called for the evaluation to measure change in GPA, however the program was not able to obtain the data for most of the participants.

Figure 13

Changes in violent crime prior to and during VGRIP



SOURCE: Vista Sheriff Substation, February 2018

The evaluation and available data do not allow for any statements of causation or correlation, as there could be many factors that impact the occurrence of crime. However, this change is in the direction Vista and partners had hoped for.

Did the community perceive any change in gang activity and gang-related crime in the target area?

While the partner survey reflected positively on the VGRIP project, Vista also wanted to hear from the community and their perception of the impact of the project on gang activity in the neighborhood. The original design called for the research staff to facilitate two listening sessions in the third year of the grant. However, despite numerous outreach efforts on the part of Vista’s grant project manager, the listening sessions were not able to be conducted as originally designed. The first session had four participants, all of whom had children involved in PA and therefore the opinions were narrow in scope. This situation also was true for the second effort, which was conducted by the Vista’s gang project manager using two methods – a discussion with three participants and an interview with two others. However, again the participants all had children involved in the same VGRIP programming (i.e., Step-Up) and the responses reflected this commonality.

The result of these efforts did not allow for a robust understanding of the how the “community” felt about crime” but did provide some interesting differences and reflections about crime and gangs in the community for these residences (Table 4). The first session was attended by parents whose children (and in one case the parent) were involved in gangs to varying degrees (e.g., child is a member, another affiliated, and a parent was an ex-member) and the second session of parents had children who were less at-risk and not affiliated with gangs. This degree of personal proximity to gang life may have influenced their responses, as the first group’s responses demonstrated more recognition and awareness of gangs and crime in the community compared to the second group’s, who did not perceive a nexus between crime and gang activity where they lived.

Both groups felt that there was more crime in their neighborhood than in the past years, but not necessarily gang-related crime. Vagrancy, homelessness, graffiti, and alcohol and drug use (especially around a liquor store) were noted as reasons for not feeling safe. However, when asked more directly about gang-related crime, all of the respondents in the first group indicated that it was an issue. The parents associated gang activity with tagging, the clothing youth were wearing, and the different areas where youth gathered as gang territory. This first group was also more likely to know about crime and gangs through their own efforts - by talking to police, youth, their children, or friends (one was a mentor and the other a community activist). This knowledge was different from the second group, who did not feel there was a gang issue in their neighborhood and if so, it was coming from outside. Their awareness about gang activity came from secondary sources (e.g., Facebook, news) rather than firsthand experience.

As to what should be done to reduce gang activity, the parents from the second group (less experienced with gangs), all felt that more pro-social activities would help youth stay away from gangs. While also recognizing the need for pro-social activities, the first group felt strongly that parental oversight and involvement was primary to gang prevention, in addition to staying busy after school. The lack of parental oversight, while personal, was not because of ill intention, but a result of having to work and not having the time or resources to provide supervised activities for their child after school. One respondent said she could only afford to send one of her children to the afterschool program because it was too expensive and another reported that she has to drop her child off an hour and a half early to get to her work and isn't there after school to pick him up. The comments support the value of a whole family approach (supporting parents and children) to counter the influence of gangs.

“Kids join gangs for a sense of belonging. Also [joining gangs] has to do with us parents because we have to work. We try to keep them busy but can’t afford programs to keep them busy.”
 Parent in first listening session, 2017

Table 4

Participants in listening sessions varied in their perspective of gangs and what should be done to prevent youth involvement

Question	First session (parents of higher-risk youth)	Second session (parents of lower-risk youth)
How do you find out about gangs?	Personal experience, interaction with youth, their own child’s involvement	Social media, neighbors, some word of mouth
Has crime changed in the neighborhood?	Yes, it has increased, but mostly crimes of nuisance	Yes, it has increased, but mostly crimes of nuisance
What are reasons for the crime?	Vagrancy, alcohol and drugs, and gangs	Homeless, vagrants, teens using drugs
Any change in gang activity in your neighborhood?	Mixed perspective – some felt it stayed the same, decreased and increased. Also recognized the schools as having a positive impact	No gang activity in the neighborhood. Recognized the schools as being a positive influence in the neighborhood and helping children avoid the gang life
What can be done about gangs?	Pro-social activities – after school programs, more jobs	Pro-social activities – after school programs, more jobs

SOURCE: SANDAG 5/16/17 listening session notes; Vista 12/21/17 listening and interview notes

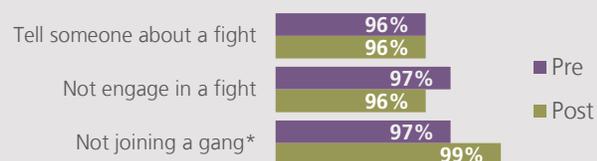
These variations in perspectives on gangs and their influence in the community, lend credence to programs that educate residents, who may have less personal experience with gangs, about what to be aware of and where to pay attention. However, despite the difference, there was a clear message of the importance of offering support to family and children through accessible afterschool and pro-social activities.

Did youths’ attitudes and behavior about gangs change as a result of participating in programs?

G.R.E.A.T. was implemented to address youths’ attitude and behavior towards gangs. Since populations of youth who participated in the classes were young and the evaluation and project is short term (3 years), it was not possible to measure what effect these prevention programs may have on future gang activity. However, the change in attitudes over time was documented using pre- and post-surveys.

A review of the G.R.E.A.T. outcomes showed mixed results in changes in participants’ attitudes about fighting, views of police officers, and future gang involvement. The pre-results indicated that most of the youth in both 4th and 5th grades already possessed the desired attitudes at the beginning of the program, leaving very little room for change. Analysis revealed no differences in outcomes between the two grades, therefore both grade levels are reported together. Over nine out of ten youth (96% to 97%) at the beginning of the program indicated they would speak up if they knew about a fight, they would not engage (i.e., walk away or wait to calm down) if someone was making them angry, and they would probably not join a gang (Figure 14A). After participation almost all of the youth reported they would be “less likely” to join a gang in the future (99% compared to 97% in pre). The data on youths’ attitude toward police was slightly different. At the start of the class around three quarters (77%) of students reported they would say “hello” to an officer if they saw one in the neighborhood, which was similar after participation (76%). The percentage who said they would call police if they saw a crime decreased slightly from pre- to post-participation (89% to 86%) (Figure 14B).

Figure 14A
G.R.E.A.T. youths’ opinions pre/post participation

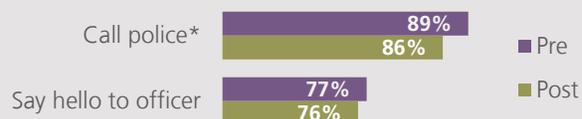


TOTAL = 1,268-1,284

NOTE: Cases with missing information not included. *Significant at P <0.05 level.

SOURCE: 4th and 5th grade pre/post G.R.E.A.T. surveys 2016-17

Figure 14B
G.R.E.A.T. youths’ opinions of officers pre/post participation



TOTAL = 1,281-1,283

NOTE: Cases with missing information not included. *Significant at P <0.05 level.

SOURCE: 4th and 5th grade pre/post G.R.E.A.T. surveys 2016-17

These results were similar to the first round of G.R.E.A.T. (2016) classes and raised concern by the partners. Because the evaluation was designed to inform the implementation, the results from the first cohort of students were analyzed soon after classes were completed and discussed with the Vista grant project manager, who in turn held discussions with the G.R.E.A.T. officers and school staff regarding the lack of change and what could be done. There were mixed conclusions as to why the expected changes were realized and some of the possible reasons for this result were discussed and are listed below:

- **Not appropriate target population** G.R.E.A.T is designed for middle school aged youth, not elementary. This age difference could have impeded youth comprehension and/or ability to relate to the curriculum, their exposure to gangs, and their understanding the assessment tool.
- **Inconsistent implementation of curriculum** There was no measure of fidelity to the model, so it is not possible to say with certainty that G.R.E.A.T. was implemented consistently across classes and/or as designed.
- **Invalid measurement tool** While the project manager tried to adapt the pre- and post-survey for the younger population, the survey was not piloted nor tested for validity (beyond the scope of this project). Poor comprehension of questions by the students or lack of sensitivity to capture variance could account for the lack of change.

Analysis was conducted to try and identify any possible differences among the classrooms (and therefore instructors), but there was not enough variance to say conclusively one way or another. Responses to the partner survey also noted the challenge with providing the curriculum to the younger youth. However, there were some partners that felt G.R.E.A.T. or the discussion about gangs should be offered to even younger students.

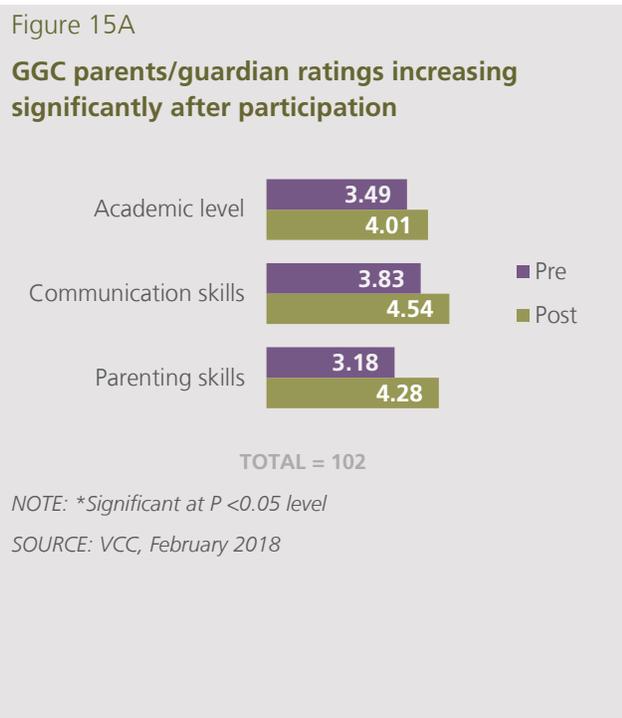
“Consistency in (G.R.E.A.T) instruction/instructor, not being able to talk about real-life problems because they are 'too mature' for 4th and 5th graders.”

“A challenge of G.R.E.A.T. is the students understanding the curriculum. It can be a little over their head at times.”

Partners feedback from the partner survey, 2017

Did communication between parent and child improve after participation in Guiding Good Choices?

As noted earlier, 102 parents enrolled and completed the GGC curriculum during the grant period. As part of the curriculum, pre- and post-surveys were given to participants (at the first and last class) to measure change in parent/child communication, gang awareness, and perceived changes in child’s substance use and school. The aim of GGC is to help improve participants’ parenting skills in an effort to impact their youth’s behavior. Results showed positive improvement in areas of parenting, youth’s academics, and communication. As shown in Figure 15A when asked to rate their child’s communication skills and academic level using a scale from 1 (being the lowest) to 5 (being the highest), on average participants rated their child’s level in academics (3.49 pre to 4.01 post) and communication skills (3.83 pre to 4.54 post) significantly higher after participation. Similarly, when asked to use the same scale (1 to 5) to rate their comfortability in their parenting skills to deal with gangs and drugs in today’s society, there was significant improvement in the average rating from 3.18 ($SD=1.16$) to 4.28 ($SD=0.85$). Examined another way, almost nine out of ten participants (88%) indicated improvement in one or more of these areas (i.e., academics, communications, and parenting) 9 percent showed no increase, and 3 percent felt there was a decrease (not shown). Additionally, participants were asked to select one “family management” skill they felt their son/daughter had improved in, with “family participation” noted most frequently (43%) as an area of improvement and responsibility noted the least (2%) (Figure 15B).



Conclusion and discussion

Because of the difference in intensity, scope, and target populations, it is neither feasible nor wise to draw one conclusion about the overall impact of VGRIP.

A review of both the goal and objectives suggests both success and areas of improvement. Overall, VGRIP either exceeded, or came very close to achieving all of its objectives. As Table 5 summarizes, the prevention programs all met their target numbers and the intervention program came close to meeting its numbers, and did achieve its outcome measures of change. The suppression operations were especially successful, exceeding their objective three-fold, by reducing the size of the operations (i.e., number of officers involved) to focus on quality of contacts. As for crime reduction, the Townsite area along with the entire City of Vista did experience a reduction in Part I violent crimes during the grant period; however, the target area's decrease was slightly larger than Vista's as a whole.

Table 5

VGRIP achieved its objectives

Objective	Met the number of participants served	Met outcome
85% of the 80 Guiding Good Choices participants will complete the curriculum and report improved communication with their children	Yes	Yes
90% of the 650 4th graders and 650 5th graders receiving G.R.E.A.T. will report negative views of gangs, gain the ability to handle conflict non-violently, and an improved comfort level with law enforcement	Yes – Served 1,300	Mixed Results– Minimal change between pre- and post- surveys
80% of the 160 Step-Up Mentoring participants will show an improved school performance and have no school disciplinary actions	Close – 156 served	Yes – (Mentors GPA increased significantly and mentees, while not significant did move in the right directions). Only two youth had a disciplinary action.
70% of the 90 Positive Action Program participants will increase risk and resilience scores, demonstrate increased academic achievement, and have no entry/re-entry in the juvenile justice system	Close - 79	Yes – Risk Scores improved; 72% had no new involvement in the justice system 12-months post participation.
1,200 youth (300/Yr1; 450/Yr2; 450/Yr3) will attend recreation programs	Yes – 1,527	N/A
32 staff and teachers will complete the Capturing Kids' Hearts program, and 90% will report using the techniques learned in the training	Exceeded – 70 attended	The use of training past participation was not captured; however, feedback from participants on the usefulness of curricula was very positive.
900 community residents will participate in community engagement activities, such as meetings and special events	Exceeded – 1,069 participants	N/A
One suppression or other related operations will be conducted monthly (or 60)	Exceeded – 268 were conducted	869 contacts and 560 arrests

SOURCE: SANDAG, 2017

As with all projects there were lessons learned during the grant period:

- ***Relationships matter*** VGRIP was created in an environment where trust and understanding of each other's roles already existed. This milieu allowed the project to focus on its objectives and not spend valuable energy creating and cultivating relationships. Receiving the grant enhanced, but did not create the collaborative environment, which speaks to the commitment for positive change by Vista, schools, community partners, and law enforcement.
- ***Leverage schools and teachers*** Feedback expressed in the quarterly meetings, the partner surveys, and after completing the Capturing Kids' Hearts training was unanimous in its support for the two-day curriculum that taught teachers skills and tools to help manage behaviors and enhance the learning environment in the classroom. The schools were a primary component of VGRIP, and the strengthening of the relationships with them by providing some professional development for their teachers, offering support for their students through programming, and holding events on their campus for the parents and residents to attend helped cement the partnership, which is imperative for sustainability.
- ***Conduct smaller rather than larger operations*** Probation shifted its method of conducting operations away from ones involving a large number of officers to ones with smaller teams in an effort to increase frequency and reduce the "intimidation" factor with the intent of facilitating positive interactions with probationers and their families. While not measured by the evaluation, it was seen as a successful approach by the Supervising Probation Officer.
- ***Ensure quality transitions of staff*** Although Vista had three different grant project managers, the care and time spent in transition from the previous manager leaving to the new one created a smooth transition and seemed to have no negative effects on the overall management of the grant.
- ***Revisit implementation of G.R.E.A.T.*** The intention of implementing G.R.E.A.T. in the lower grades was to reach youth sooner to divert any future pull towards gang involvement. However, the evaluation results do not support the modification of G.R.E.A.T. from intended audience (middle school) to elementary school. Furthermore, periodic monitoring of G.R.E.A.T. instruction is encouraged to ensure consistent delivery of the material.
- ***Data collection and evaluation tasks are time consuming*** To offset some of the evaluation costs, program partners were responsible for most of the data collection. This data collection was a challenge because partners did not always have the time to gather the appropriate data nor the staff to enter it in a timely manner. This situation led to more missing information than was desired, as well as extra efforts to clean the data that was provided. For future endeavors, it is recommended that a staff person be designated in the budget that is responsible for the data collection at the program level or allow the research partner to have a more active role in the data collection.