

Structure and hierarchy of street gangs

When dealing with street gangs one must remember that not all gangs are tightly structured and have one leader. Some organizations have tens of thousands of members, have been around for generations, have constitutions which mirror municipal codebooks, and conduct criminal activity worldwide.

On the other hand other street gangs have only a few members, have territorial boundaries of only a block or two, and fall in and out of existence. This is important to remember when dealing with the multitude of gangs that exist in today's environment.

This article concerns itself with the older, established, multigenerational criminal organizations. The descriptions of the hierarchy are only applicable to them, and not to all of the street gangs which are in existence throughout the world.

There is usually one position of highest rank. This leader position is usually occupied by a person who is incarcerated. It is from the penitentiary that the majority of the rules and assignments are allocated. From within prison walls the orders concerning new activities, alliances, and new rivalries are established. Often mixes of the orders from the penitentiary coupled with the current conditions in any given city are the basis for changes in operations from location to location.

Gang members see prison as a type of insurance policy. They know that because of the activities they involve themselves in, that prison is an ultimate eventuality of their lives. If they respect the orders coming out of the penitentiary when on the street, when they become incarcerated they will be in the good graces of the controlling people and then taken care of during the duration of their sentences.

Underneath the leader there is usually a committee of leaders representing both incarcerated members, and ones still active outside of prison. This committee is a stronghold for the leader, as it will be the body that dispatches orders to each given faction of the gang inside and out side of prison. It is comprised of the persons most trusted by the leader.

The next positions would be those of the individual factions. They are all separate criminal organizations, but usually can be called together for the common cause of the overall organization. The street corner they actually are located at and or the neighborhood nickname of the location designate the separate factions.

Within some select groups there may even be sub factions that exist. This is most apparent with the Disciples, Vice lords and Stones. They will separate themselves from the generic names just listed into factions. There will be numerous separate factions that are a part of the original faction, and thus the sub factions now exist.

An example of this would be the following. The Disciples are broken down into several factions: Black Disciples, Gangster Disciples, Black Gangsters, Black Gangster

Disciples, Black Souls, Maniac Latin Disciples, YLO Latin Disciples, Satan Disciples, and Spanish Gangster Disciples. There are numerous locations for each of the separate factions that are designated by their exact location, and thus the sub factions are now in the picture of the overall scheme of things. To make the point clearer, I will actually categorize on a four-way breakdown a member's affiliation.

The member is from the Disciples street gang. 1) Immediately he or she is listed under the Folks nation. 2) The next heading would be under the generic designation of Disciples. 3) The faction would now have to be listed, for this example I will make it Spanish Gangster Disciples. 4) Finally, the sub faction would have to be addressed (the exact location). We will make this person a member from the sub faction located at 88th and Houston streets, an area that is known on the street as the "danger zone".

Each sub faction usually has many key positions in it. Warlord, enforcer, historian, and bailbondsman are just some. The warlord is in charge of the ongoing alliances and rivalries that exist in the immediate area around the sub factions main corner of operations. Enforcers are responsible for the disciplinary measures within the given sub faction. Historians take care of record keeping and the evolution of the gang's activities. He or she may also be in charge of keeping the constitution of the gang in updated form. The bailbondsman is in charge of a certain portion of the gang's money to be used for purposes of bail when members are incarcerated.

Underneath these positions are the ones that are usually designated as lookouts, runners, and soldiers. The rank and file of each faction or subfaction. The main body of the given gang is comprised of these positions. They are the members who, in many of the circumstances, are operating the drive up curb side narcotics distribution, performing the narcotics distribution of the gang from a building, and performing the general day to day operations of the gang.

Hopefully an understanding of the structure of these organizations will help you target and prosecute specific members of these criminal organizations, and thus combat there operations to a more effective degree.

Portions of this article were taken from "The Street Gang Identification Manual" available from Gang Prevention Incorporated. 1-800-295-GANG. For the next Gang Prevention Incorporated Gang Specialist Certification Course call the 800 number or visit the web site at www.gangpreventioninc.com