

Seminar educates residents on gang lingo, operations

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Pocono Record Writer

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If you heard the phrase, "My homeboy is strapped and is ready to bust a cap," would you know what it meant?

East Stroudsburg Area School District presented a community safety program on Saturday to help area residents learn more about gang activity. There were two opportunities for parents to come out and learn more about gangs, a morning seminar held at J.T. Lambert Intermediate School in East Stroudsburg as well as an afternoon seminar at East Stroudsburg High School North in Bushkill.

Michael Leonard, criminal justice consultant and gang expert, helped to educate parents, teachers, students and law enforcement on what to look for in gang activity.

"Everyone needs to get to know the terminology, or streetology," Leonard said.

A test on gang terminology given to attendees proved that many people are unaware of what certain gang phrases mean.

As well as the "streetology," Leonard showed the audience of about 15 people who attended the afternoon seminar what some common gang graffiti looks like. He also explained the meaning of the pictures and abbreviations. "Graffiti is the newspaper of the streets," Leonard said. "Gangs have their own alphabet."

There were 95 gang members in the county in August 2007, according to the Monroe County Gang Task Force. Sixty percent of them came from New York and 24 percent from New Jersey. "The Bloods are the largest gang in Monroe County. The Latin Kings are the second largest in the Poconos," Leonard said.

So why are the Poconos seeing more gang activity in recent years?

"Gangs are not only a big city problem anymore. The Poconos are a fertile environment for gangs since many parents work in the city and leave the kids at home without supervision," Leonard said. "There is also more space and less law enforcement."

Leonard made sure to explain what a gang really is to the attendees. "The definition of a gang is that they have a name, claim a territory, hang out on a continuous basis, distinguish themselves from other groups and must be involved in criminal activity," he said. "No area is immune. They look for communities in denial that refuse to believe there are gangs."

The only way to combat the problem is education; learning the signs can help reduce the problem.

"Some signs that your child is in a gang include dramatic changes in dress style, certain hand gestures, strong preference for specific colors, going out late and skipping school," Leonard said. "Always remember that wanna-bes are gonna be."

Middle Smithfield resident Diane Krause has a son in Lehman Intermediate School. She went to the seminar to learn more about the what to look for. "I want to know what my son is facing at school. I need to know what is happening and how to protect him," she said. "I have been here for 20 years and in that time, I have seen more than I want to see."

A socio-drama was performed to explain some common real-life situations in an interactive way.

The socio-drama included situations in domestic violence and gang issues. Students acted out scenarios to show parents a few of the things that today's youth face.

Knowing the signs is the first step. "If you find a paper with gang signs and pictures on it, sent it to me to get it translated," Leonard said. "Parents, teachers and law enforcement need to all be on the same page as well. We need to all come together in a uniformed way."

For more information, visit www.gangsRreal.com

Gang words

Some commonly used gang terms and their meanings:

Jumped in — Initiated into a gang

Banger — Gang member

Dis — Show disrespect to someone

Busting caps — Shooting a gun

Bacon — Police

Holdin' down — Controlling turf or area

Shanking — Knifing

Cross out — Disrespect to a rival gang graffiti

To jack — Rob someone

Trim — Have sex

Strapped — Carries a gun

187 — Homicide

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Michael Leonard, a criminal justice consultant, speaks to a group on the effect of gang violence at East Stroudsburg North's auditorium on Saturday afternoon.

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