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## In-Depth

# Ganging up on gangs

By Alice Wheeler  
Emerald Managing Editor

*Editor's note: The following is the second of a two-part In-Depth series examining the gang issue in Eugene.*

Lonny Jackson runs a Minority Affairs program at the MacLaren School, a state juvenile institution for male juvenile delinquents near Salem. The program primarily works with youth gang members who have been sentenced to serve time at MacLaren because of gang-related crimes.

Jackson is from Los Angeles, and is a former gang member himself. He has been at MacLaren for eight years and started the program because, "we needed a program that was really going to make these guys take time to look at where they are going."

Originally, only black youth

participated in the sessions, but the program has expanded to more than 70 kids — black, white, hispanic, Crips, Bloods and Skinheads all actively participate in the voluntary program.

Jackson attributes gang involvement to family dysfunction, exposure to crime and violence, the community's economic development, a negative environment, a lack of positive role models, and an inadequate job market. These factors combined can create a sense of hopelessness and low self-esteem.

The arrival of crack on the drug market gave gangs a way to make a great deal of money. "With crack cocaine these kids now have an economic function. They can make a lot of money and acquire some of the things everybody wants," Jackson said. "It is really attractive to kids with that kind of back-

ground."

Dion, 17, and Deandre, 18, both MacLaren residents and former gang members, said gang crack dealers do not usually use crack except as a means to an end — money and everything you can get with it.

"Gangs sell it but you don't really do it," Dion said. "A lot of people who sell the drugs and run the organization aren't around it at all."

### The Right Word

Jackson's program involves giving kids "the right word." "The kids grew up with a lot of wrong words," Jackson explained. He uses key phrases in his sessions such as "Be brave to dare to be right. It takes a lot of courage to dare to be right."

"It's an educational process, a treatment issue and a deprogramming process," he said. "These kids have their own set of values and morals."

"You can't just give a kid who has been in a gang some serious responsibility and a job," he added. "You have to deal with their mentality first, 'cause otherwise you are setting them up to fail."

Jackson said he tries to get the youths to think positively about themselves and gives them "straight talk, mixed with frightening reality."

"It's important to have them take a realistic look at their life and where they are headed if their behavior doesn't change," he said. "For us there are only three options: prisons, dead, or useless to yourself."

The program has an approximate one in five success rate, which experts say is a surprisingly good record for dealing with gangs.

"After hearing the same thing over and over we come to terms with what we are doing to our community and what we are doing to people is hurtful," Dion said. "I know what the business is about, I know where it's going to get me. I feel a lot better now I have a lot of support."

### Needing Support

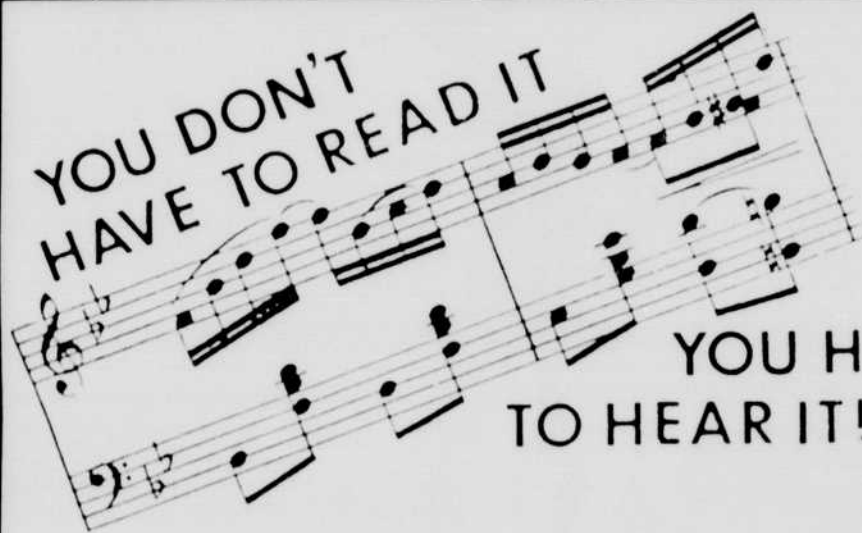
The need for youth support is a common theme, especially for minority youth. Ruben Cota, director of the Chicano Affairs Center in Eugene, said he doesn't believe the community supports minority programs.

"I know because I try to run one here and they do not support minority programs in the community, so therefore how can they promote supporting any kind of programs for minority youth?" he asked.

"I think kids need some alternatives to gangs. They join gangs because they get some self-esteem out of it," Cota said. "The community is ripe for a gang problem, because minority kids are going to go toward that because that's where the power is."

Cota said believes the solution would include less racism in the community, better employment opportunities for minority youth and a positive educational experience. "Minority youth are not finding anything of relative value to their lives in an educational experience," he said.

"A kid goes to school, all his teachers are white, so what does that tell him about his



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