

# Unity in the Community Confronts Gangs

## Adult volunteers develop action plan for at-risk youth

BY CARI HACHMANN  
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Reaching out to curb the eruption of gang violence, local pastors and volunteers from the church community have unfolded a new effort to make themselves present to at-risk youth with a four step action plan: Be there, care, share and prayer.

"Gang members are no less human, they cling to a sense of family and belonging," says Robert Richardson who runs a transitional program at Emmanuel Temple Church for former gang members and parolees returning home from prison.

Richardson, as part of a larger community effort called "Unity in the Community," recognizes the need to make a visible adult presence in the lives of at-risk youth, especially in places where gang activity is most likely to occur.

Launched by pastors of several churches, the group hopes to develop a better physical and emotional bond with at-risk youth.



PHOTO BY CARI HACHMANN/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER  
Robert Richardson, program director at Emmanuel Community Services in north Portland, is a volunteer for Unity in the Community, an anti-gang outreach by adults to reach at-risk youth.

The first action plan calls for a visible presence at high-risk areas by mobilizing 100 volunteers who would each commit to foot patrol 45 minutes each week for a year.

The group has started patrols at Holladay Park, the location where 14-teen-year old Shiloh Hampton was shot and killed, making attempts to interrupt gang activity and engage with youth in a positive way.

The second step in the effort aims at having a more connected presence with youth by providing one-on-one mentorships. Third, brings the development of counseling and family support actions, and finally, prayer for the community.

"Young people, I think are misunderstood," said Pastor C.T. Wells of Emmanuel Temple and a leader of Unity in the Community. Wells said

when there is no communication with youth they become further separated and disenfranchised from the core of society.



In a vacuum of insecurity and uncertainty, new gang recruits find themselves drawn to gangs when there is no stronger system to deter them, said Richardson.

As law enforcement makes it tougher for kids with guns to operate on the street, the gang outreach and church community members hope they can do their part to prevent further violence from destroying lives, young and old.


Unity in the Community invites local residents and potential volunteers to their first meeting on Friday, June 10 from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. at Life Change Christian Center, 3635 N. Williams Ave.

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