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## **Advancement Project Receives Award for Gang Intervention**

The Advancement Project's Urban Peace Academy, which has worked to reduce gang violence in many neighborhoods throughout Los Angeles County, received the 2015 John Anson Ford Human Relations award for their efforts from the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors.

Since their founding in 2008, the academy has trained more than 2,400 individuals – many of them at-risk youths and current or former gang members – on how to negotiate gang truces, discourage retaliatory shootings, and quell rumors that lead to violence.

The trained staff also works with law enforcement officers, emergency room staff, school safety personnel, and various government agencies and nonprofit organizations, resulting in improved collaboration, shared accountability for public safety, and effective community policing.

“The academy’s innovative approach gives neighborhoods a chance to thrive,” said Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas. “Through this work, the academy also creates employment opportunities for at-risk youth and current or former gang members.”

Many graduates of the academy’s rigorous 14-week training course have gone on to work for the cities of Los Angeles and Long Beach’s Summer Night Lights programs, which keep parks and recreation centers open until almost midnight during the summer months. By holding sports tournaments and other activities, Summer Night Lights provides an alternative to gang involvement, as well as links to wraparound services.

“We work with former gang members to help develop the skills to engage active gang members to reduce violence,” said Fernando Rejon, deputy director of Urban Peace for the Advancement Project. “We also train law enforcement officers on how to engage with gang intervention workers, and how to engage in community policing strategies that are more effective for community safety.”

The academy’s innovative techniques are now being emulated by other cities in California, as well as in Columbus, Ohio; Memphis, Tennessee; and Seattle, Washington.

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