

**Truancy Task Force Meeting Summary**  
Children's Court  
September 13, 2011

**Attendees:**

*Courts:* Donna Groman, Margaret Henry, Jack Furay, Sherri Sobel, Susel Orellana

*Law Enforcement:* Lydia Bodin, Kristen Byrdsong, John Gutierrez, Gerry Johnson

*Legal:* David Sapp, Carol Richardson

*LA County Chief Executive Office:* Trish Ploehn

*LA County Youth Departments:* Jennifer Hottenroth, Patty Armani

*City of Los Angeles:* Michael de la Rocha

*Schools:* Debra Duardo, Ray Vincent, Laurel Bear, Lorena Martinez-Vargas, Belinda Walker

*Community/Advocacy:* Miller Sylvan, Michelle Newell, Zoe Rawson, Barbara Lott-Holland, Edenia Jones

*Education Coordinating Council:* Sharon Watson

*Guests:* Don Ferguson, Henry Siegel

**Welcome and Introductions:**

In Judge Nash's absence, Judge Groman welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked for self-introductions.

**Recap of 8/23/11 TTF Meeting/Community Forum:**

Barbara Lott-Holland of the Strategy Center's Community Rights Campaign reported that there was an excellent turnout, with 65 people attending the forum. The youth who participated were very pleased with the number of TTF members who were present (18) and with their responses to the speakers' comments. The TTF, in turn, thanked the Strategy Center for hosting the forum, noting that the speakers offered solutions as well as relating their experiences, some of which were "heartbreaking."

De la Rocha reported that Councilman Cardenas is interested in amending the municipal code to reflect some of these solutions and may hold a joint meeting between the City Council and the LAPD to facilitate this process.

**Mobiletrec SafeKidZone Program:**

3.2 million people are involved in violent crime each year and 32 million are affected by it. Mobiletrec is a technology program, begun four years ago ("pre-Apple iPhone") that seeks to mobilize families, schools and neighborhoods to provide a safety net of responders to improve protection and accountability. Families can be equipped with an option on their mobile phone that triggers a massive response when and where necessary;

schools can have an affordable, easily deployable, cell phone-based, tool to manage truant students; and neighborhoods can be empowered to respond when someone needs help. With respect to truancy, smart phones with a panic button are given out to students and their families to create a safe school zone, as students are prime targets for bullies and are scared. When the Mobiletrec system was first initiated, 2 of 10 panic button calls required police intervention, so police are now involved with the program from the beginning. Schools may apply for assistance or parents can do so voluntarily; referrals can also come from a SART or SARB. The Alhambra USD is piloting the truancy piece of Mobiletrec's services, paid for through its Gateway program, and about two dozen students are voluntarily participating. Panic button calls go student family members as well as to that district's 4 resource police officers. Because of its success, AUSD will soon promote this program district-wide, using their SARB to make referrals.

### **LAUSD Grad Van Project:**

The District's Grad Van circulates among well-populated areas, is staffed by bilingual personnel, and is outfitted with computers that are hooked up to the LAUSD data system. It provides information about school enrollment, student grades, test scores, CAHSEE exam scores, after-school program participation, etc., much like that of a student cumulative record. Arrangements for Grad Van visits can be made through Nancy Soto (213-241-3844). Judge Henry inquired as to why the van is needed, as CSWs should be able to get this kind of information directly from the school district. While that would be an ideal solution to the current (and very frustrating) data-sharing issues, there are still some administrative issues that prevent this kind of exchange. The Grad Van fills the tremendous need for educational information while these difficulties are being resolved. Right now, the Children's Court has arranged for the van to be parked at the court at least once a month so that court officers, CSWs, children's attorneys, and holders of education rights can easily obtain educational information on the youth they are responsible for. The next visit to the Court is scheduled for October 6.

### **Los Angeles Community Collaborative: ACLU, Community Rights Campaign, and Public Counsel:**

David Sapp pointed out that the Collaborative has been focusing on the issuance of daytime curfew violation tickets, especially those issued for tardiness, and the negative impact of these tickets on parents who aren't even permitted to speak at hearings on their children's behalf. LAPD's new directive, which the Collaborative helped shape, is a positive step for addressing this issue, and more work is being done to find other solutions. The Collaborative reviewed the research on preventing/reducing truancy and looked at the Denver, Ohio and Baltimore models. Most current efforts are pilot programs and, therefore, there is not a lot of information/data on results.

He then walked TTF members through the Collaborative's handout: *Addressing the Root Causes of Chronic Absence and Truancy: Developing a Comprehensive Approach to Improving Student Attendance, Academic Engagement & Community Health in Los*

*Angeles County.* This document includes the top 30 core components of a research-based strategy to improve school attendance in the County. Its four main recommendations are:

- Repeal or significantly curtail the current LAPD daytime curfew ordinance and the method of its enforcement in court
- Use the Baltimore approach as a sensible and sustainable school district-wide way of ensuring that students stay in school
- Reform the IJTC court process to focus on solutions and support
- Ensure accurate and regular public dissemination of data on a bi-annual basis from public agencies with roles in implementing or enforcing policies that affect school attendance

On behalf of the Collaborative, David stressed that a vision is needed for bringing together all that we're learning from the pilots and ongoing research.

Lydia pointed out that communities are very invested in SARBs, as it is a tremendous process and a lot of good work is being done through these Boards. City and County agencies are involved and youth are getting a lot of services as a result. The parent education that occurs while they are in court waiting rooms is also a key feature.

### **Summary of TTF Learnings and Next Steps:**

Sharon distributed a list of the agreements and/or learnings of the TTF over the past year. This list highlights some components of an overall approach, what is not working well currently, and what is working well in major stakeholder arenas—schools, parents, courts, law enforcement, and communities. General policies and practices that have proven to be effective or show promise were also included.

The TTF agreed that a workgroup is needed to forge an overall approach to increasing school attendance in the County, based on the documents presented today and TTF meeting discussions during the past year, and begin identifying recommended actions for implementing some of the best ideas generated so far. Sharon asked for volunteers for this group and will set a date for its first meeting by the end of the month. The October and December meetings of the task force will focus on this work.

### **Next Meeting:**

The next meeting of the task force will be on October 11, 2011 at 12 noon in the Judges Conference Room at the Children's Court.