

# Steps to stop gang violence

Written by Deb Egenberger

Thursday, 09 December 2010 16:47 -

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## Dawson County plan aims to end alarming juvenile trends.

LEXINGTON—The numbers are a little unnerving.

The arrest rate for Dawson County last year was 80.2 arrests for every 1,000 residents, close to twice the statewide average.

The county's juvenile arrest rate was 32.8 when the last statistics were compiled in 2004.

That juvenile number has likely jumped since then, according to Midwest Nebraska Drug Court coordinator Stephen Garcia.

Gang-related activity has contributed to the increase in crime.

The number of single-parent households is on the rise and in turn increases proportionately among minority families.

"We've got one of the nation's fastest growing juvenile minority populations," Garcia told county commissioners last week.

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In fact, at Lexington Public Schools Garcia said the minority rate is 84% of all students. Last year it was 75%.

“I can’t believe how unbelievably bad some of these trends are,” said Dean Kugler, county commissioner from Gothenburg. “It’s alarming.”

Garcia addressed the county board during its regular bimonthly meeting on Dec. 1 asking for approval of the newest three-year comprehensive juvenile services plan.

With a set of seven priorities and strategies to accomplish goals, Garcia said the plan is aimed at strengthening all juvenile services and addressing problems related to gang activity.

“It’s not going to reduce all of the problems,” he said, “but at least it’s a start.”

The county’s original juvenile services plan was approved in 2007. The new version includes a more concerted effort toward reducing gang-related activity.

Garcia told commissioners a gang prevention and intervention specialist has been hired to help officials reach to the core of the problem.

“We’re only going to address this through collaboration,” Garcia said. “We seem to have a solid group of agencies working together.”

Garcia also acknowledged that juvenile gang activity isn’t isolated from adult gang crimes.

“Many of the juveniles in gangs have older family members in gangs as well,” he said. “You

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