

GANGS \$1.2 million grant aims at Watsonville gangs

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A \$1.2 million, three-year state grant has been awarded to seven local agencies and the Santa Cruz County Criminal Justice Council to help suppress gang violence in the Pajaro Valley, Watsonville city officials said Wednesday.

Agencies benefiting from the \$400,000-per-year grant include the district attorney's office, Santa Cruz County Probation Department and the five agencies that make up the Gang Intervention Team, or GIT, which are Watsonville's police and recreation and parks departments, Pajaro Valley Prevention and Student Assistant Program, Fenix drug and alcohol program, and Youth Services.

The groups have joined in a Local Anti-Gang Coordinating Committee.

"The GIT program was the nucleus behind getting the grant," said John Hopkins, chief deputy district attorney. "I believe we

received it because the collaborative agencies demonstrated a very strong commitment to the community."

The grant will be used to help the local agencies intervene with gang members and give at-risk youth and their families the information, attitudes and skills necessary to prevent gang involvement.

The core of the new program is the Gang Violence Suppression Technical Team, made up of 10 full-time employees, including a probation officer, a prosecutor, a school-based gang intervention specialist, a police gang officer, a city recreation specialist and counselors working for Fenix and Youth Services.

The grant is from the California Office of Criminal Justice Planning through its Broad-based Apprehension, Suppression, Treatment and Alternatives program, also called BASTA, which is Spanish for "enough."