



Community activist Frank Ojeda addresses seminar



Juvenile crew removes trash from hillside lot.



A day's work stacks up significantly.

PHOTOS BY GLENN SANDERS

Metro Clean Gang Awareness Seminars Stress Goals, Education to Youthful Offenders

By GLENN W. SANDERS

(March 27) When Frank Ojeda tells a young man that he might be dead tomorrow he speaks from experience. Ojeda is a community specialist in the East LA Community Gang Reduction Project and has seen more than his share of gang violence.

"Even if you aren't in a gang, we aren't promised tomorrow," Ojeda warns the youngsters.

Ojeda has been promoting his message in gang awareness seminars with MTA Metro Clean every month for over a year. Metro Clean is the MTA's community service program. Both adults and juveniles pay their debt to society by cleaning buses, bus stops and inactive rail rights-of-way throughout the county.

The gang awareness seminars are targeted at juvenile offenders, many convicted of vandalism or fare evasion. More than 120 juveniles have participated in the seminars since their inception.

Ojeda provides a gritty description of gang life and discusses the motivations for joining a gang. He reminds the young men and women in his seminar audiences that as soon as they join a gang they have thousands of enemies.

'They shoot at your house'

"Once you're in (a gang) everyone's in: your mom, dad, sister, brother," he warns. "They don't care because they shoot at the whole house."

How does a young person stay out of a gang? Ojeda says it starts with having goals and role models.

"Life will mold your role for you if you don't have goals," Ojeda says. "You won't like what you end up with." He also reminds each youth to value their lives and finish school.

The partnership between Metro Clean and the Community Gang Reduction Project was originally conceived with the goal of reducing recidivism. By reducing the number of repeat offenders it is hoped that graffiti and fare evasion will be reduced.

Raymond Baldonado, a Metro Clean supervisor closes the seminar by stressing the importance of what Ojeda has taught the youngsters.

"Our hope is that we can reach at least one of you," he says. "These are not just words – this is real life experience."

[Back to MTA Report](#)

