



City asks employers to step up

By Preston Phillips

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Fresno city officials drove home a message of intervention and prevention at today's second annual U.S. Attorney's Gang Prevention Summit... As they work toward eliminating the city's most violent gangs.

People say in order to accomplish that goal, they'll need local employers to step up... and take a chance.

Nearly 10 years ago, Mandingo Cain was involved in a very violent Oakland street gang, Seven-one gangsters.

You have to keep a certain demeanor, mentality, you know, so you have to present yourself as an angry person," says Cain.

But today, Cain is a happy man. He's been given a second chance.

From a company, where the philosophy is quite different from the average employer.

"If everyone could just make one job opportunity for someone who needs a second chance, we can change our communities forever," said Shegerian.

John Shegerian, Chairman and CEO of electronic recyclers says his concept of giving former gang members a second chance at life, began in Los Angeles in the early 90's, just after the Rodney King riots...

Back then it was called homeboy's tortillas... His idea was to take kids who were gang impacted and give them a job opportunity...

Today, that organization, now referred to as "homeboy industries" has received national attention and has employed over 3- thousand impacted youth within the last 15 years...

Shegerian says, "People just want a chance in life and no matter where they've been on the wrong side of the tracks, everybody wants to have a chance of employment and a chance to turn their life around."

Cain says, "When I go back to Oakland, i give people hope, you know they say wow, he made it, he did it, he really made a difference, he made a change. If he can do it, I can do it."

Now, the Fresno Police Department is encouraging more city employers to step up... and do the same.

Anytime you take a former gang member off the streets, get them employed and make them productive

citizens, those individuals are no longer terrorizing neighborhoods," said Fresno police chief Jerry Dyer.

Shegerian says, "the great part about this, is that everybody can be a part of the solution. Everyone has a chance to serve here."

And for the hundreds in attendance at today's gang prevention summit... Mayor Alan Autry made the message very clear.

"Lives will either be saved or lost by what comes out of this room," Autry said.

Something Mandingo Cain... Already knows.

He said, "Where I'm from, a lot of people didn't make it out, so of course, me coming out of it, they say, aww you know, you'll be back, you belong to us. But hey, it's been ten years now."

Now Cain says he's able to take care of his wife and kids, while making an honest living... He says, "At electronic recyclers, not only do we recycle electronics, but we recycle lives."

He adds that his life too has been recycled.