

## **FROM THE STREETS TO SILVER SCREENS: Behind the scenes with a gang liaison** By CASHEN CONROY | August 20, 2018

The first time location manager Alison Taylor met Bone was in 2001, when she was in The Jungle working on the crime thriller *Training Day*. They had just been introduced when an argument broke out between two men nearby. Then suddenly, one of them pulled out a gun.

“Where I’m from, you go the opposite direction when somebody pulls a gun out,” Taylor said. But Bone, whose legal name is Cle Shaheed Sloan, charged right towards it. He snatched the gun out of the man’s hand and “went off on” him, saying: “What are you doing? What are you thinking?”

“I [stood] there thinking, *What the hell, am I at work? And, like, who is this guy?*” Taylor remembered.

There are many terms for what Sloan does. Some call him a “gang liaison,” a “neighborhood liaison,” a “gang advisor,” or a “tech advisor”; others simply use the phrase “assistant location manager.” Essentially, he helps location managers navigate filming in neighborhoods with high levels of gang activity, and guarantees that they don’t have to worry about being chased away or having their equipment stolen or vandalized. He’s also responsible for hiring local community members—often, active gang members—as liaisons and extras. Additionally, he lends his extensive knowledge on gang culture to production teams that are attempting to accurately portray gang members in films or TV shows.

Sloan is uniquely equipped for this role because, as he puts it, he’s “bilingual”; after working in the film industry for around 17 years, he’s fluent in the language of production, but as an “inactive member” of the Athens Park Bloods, the language of the streets is his mother tongue.

Sloan joined the Bloods when he was just 13 years old. In the 37 years between then and now, he has been shot on four separate occasions and arrested more times than he can count.

“I really didn’t have any vision of my life going past 25 years old. Coming up in the streets, I just knew, just like everybody else, I would die, I would be killed, I would go to jail. That was the norm, and I didn’t have a problem with that,” Sloan said. “I was an Athens Park Blood, and that was going to be my legacy.”

Then, in 1994, Sloan was hired as a production assistant for the film *I Love Trouble* through Football Hall of Famer Jim Brown’s self-empowerment program called Amer-I-Can. During his time on set, he discovered his passion for the film industry, so after shooting had wrapped, he continued to pursue both production and acting work on different projects. One day, while portraying himself in *Training Day*, Sloan heard that the production team was trying to find an authentic neighborhood to film in. He took them to his own, and his career as a “gang liaison” began.

Since then, Sloan has tech advised for 40 movies and 15 different TV shows, including *Straight Outta Compton*, *Southland*, *Sons of Anarchy*, *Gang Related*, and, more recently, *Insecure*. He

also co-produced the TV series *Unsolved* and directed the award-winning documentary *Bastards of the Party*, which examines fifty years of gang violence in Southern California. Now he's focusing on transitioning more fully into the role of producer; for the upcoming film *Tax Collector*, he will receive consulting producer credit in addition to being listed as an actor.

When working as a tech advisor, Sloan has two goals. The first is to help crews film safely in dangerous areas. The second is to provide local community members with economic opportunities, so the crew isn't simply going in and taking advantage of the neighborhood.

"My mission is to bring resources to the street," he says.

When a location manager contacts Sloan about working in a certain area, he first figures out who the key players are. Then, he hires some of them to scope out spots to film in and to recruit locals to serve as "authentic" extras. He also often hires resident gang members to work as a second layer of security, and it pays off: "When [the local hires] see somebody who they know is the troublemaker approaching the film crew, they are far better equipped to tell them, 'You've got to get out of here,' than our regular security," said Taylor, who works with Sloan so often that she refers to him as her "work husband." According to Taylor, the decision to hire local community members "is a getting permission thing, but it's also an empowering thing so that people don't just feel exploited."

When film crews enter lower-income areas for short periods of time to film a project and then leave, the disparity between the film industry professionals' lives and those of the neighborhood residents becomes strikingly obvious. As Sloan points out, Hollywood film crews want to capture a certain level of grittiness in their movies, but they're not the ones who actually have to live with it. "They'll come into the worst part of town and make their movie and then they're back in Hollywood, back in Beverly Hills, back in Bel Air," said Sloan. "Meanwhile, the streets are still the streets, and these guys are still going to be economically challenged."

That's why for Sloan, it's extremely important that he bring real economic opportunities to the neighborhoods where studios are shooting. He pays his hired liaisons \$350 per day, and while background extras generally earn \$100 for eight hours, Sloan ensures that the locals he hires for those roles make \$250. He also requires production teams to have a minimum contract of three days, so either the extras must be hired for three full days, or they must get paid for three days even if they only work one. If location managers aren't willing to pay for the three-day minimum, Sloan will simply tell them, "I'm not your guy." He also involves as many local community members as possible in order to maximize the benefits that arise from the film team's use of the area. When he worked on *Straight Outta Compton* back in 2015, Sloan hired 208 gang members from across L.A., and for *Training Day*, he hired around 300. The positive results are tangible: today, at least five gang members Sloan originally brought into the industry are production assistants and two are grips, one of whom is about to buy his first house.

"I've hired more gang members in the city of Los Angeles than anybody, excluding Father Boyle over at Homeboy Industries," Sloan said. Homeboy Industries is a nonprofit youth program aimed at providing training and support for former gang members and incarcerated men and women, with a \$14.7 million budget. "I'm in second place," Sloan said.

Sloan has made enough of a name for himself in this role that even members of rival gangs put aside their differences when he shows up because they know that his presence signals possible financial gain. Despite his allegiance to the Bloods, Sloan has successfully worked with several offshoots of the Crips, including the 53 Street Avalon Crips, the 40s Crips, and the Hoover Crips. “[When they see me,] they say, ‘Hey that’s Bone, and he’s a Blood, so especially if he’s in our Crip neighborhood, it must be an opportunity,’” Sloan explains.

In the minds of many location managers, working with gangs through Sloan isn’t that different from dealing with any neighborhood homeowners’ association.

“If I want to go film in Ladera Heights, the Ladera Heights Homeowners’ Association is going to come out and demand a couple thousand dollars, just to make [the film crews] go away. It’s the same thing [as dealing with gangs], it’s just some people will spend money on new flowers and painting addresses on the curbs,” location manager David Lyons said. “Quite honestly, I’ve found neighborhood gangs to be a lot more pleasant than most homeowners’ associations,” he added with a laugh.

Sometimes, in addition to hiring locals, production teams also make donations to community causes as a way to thank a neighborhood for letting them invade the area for a period of time. These donations can range from around \$500 to \$2,500, according to location manager Neal Prosansky, who worked with a team that donated to a neighborhood’s toy drive. Prosansky says that whenever he goes into a gang-affiliated neighborhood, he tries to do things the “right” way, and in return, he receives unparalleled insight and access into the neighborhood. Taylor and Lyons say the same is true for them.

Every now and then, however, location managers get a glimpse of what it looks like when a production crew fails to navigate these areas with respect and an insider’s connections. In the early 2000s, when Lyons was a production assistant on *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*, the crew was filming in Watts. They had hired security guards and employed a police presence, but “[they] had not gone through the proper channels in the neighborhood to make sure it was okay to be there,” said Lyons. On the night of the NBA All-Star Game, a group of gang members came out into the street and started physically shaking the police’s mobile response unit back and forth. Helicopters and backup police officers were called onto the scene “in droves” to respond. For Lyons, the incident stressed the importance of always calling first.

Taylor, who has been working as a location manager for over 20 years, says that the largest takeaway from working with gang liaisons is a new understanding of the realities of gang life. “I’ve been to several services of funerals for people that I had worked with who have been murdered,” she said. “When you’re with guys that you’re working with, they’re just regular people, they’re telling jokes, but then there’s the reality that there’s a whole other piece of their life that is completely foreign to you.”

Sloan is particularly skilled at transitioning between these different parts of his life, and his ability to turn “on and off” certain aspects of identity has allowed him to form relationships he never could have anticipated; he’s now friends with cops he used to literally run from. Upon

walking onto the set of *Southland*, where he was working as a technical advisor, he learned that the advisor who had been hired on the police side was none other than Michael Patterson, a Los Angeles deputy sheriff who had chased him down an alley 15 years before. “We totally recognized each other immediately and we both just smiled and laughed, like, ‘This is crazy,’” Sloan said.

In addition to improving his relationships with individual officers he has gotten to know on set, Sloan has also developed a sense of mutual respect with the Los Angeles Police Department as a whole. When Sloan hires gang members from crime-ridden neighborhoods, the time they may have otherwise used to commit wrongdoings is instead spent managing equipment or acting as an extra on a movie set. Thus, what Sloan does directly benefits the police department in a way—and they appreciate it. A few weeks ago, Robert Deamer and the LAPD Newton Division went to the Pueblo Projects to present Sloan with an official LAPD jacket to thank him for the positive impact he has made. During the presentation, Sloan was conscious of the fact that 30 or 40 Pueblo Bishop Bloods were standing within eyeshot, witnessing the exchange. The cops acknowledged it as well—“Of course, you're not going to put [the jacket] on right here,” one said. Sloan wondered if the respect he had gained during his active membership in the Bloods and the opportunities he provides for countless gang members would be enough to override the typical prejudices against a partnership with police. Then he thought about his friendship with Deamer and the many projects they had worked on together.

He put on the jacket.

“The cops were floored, but my homeboys didn’t even blink,” Sloan remembers. “They know who I am.”