

OPINION

There is hope

Today we launch a three-part Metroland Media Group investigative series online that looks at suicide among young people in Ontario.

As members of the media, there are very few, if any, topics we avoid like suicide. The fear, since the late 1800s, is that reporting on suicides prompts copycatting. In many cases, we investigate an accident until we discover it's a suicide and end our pursuit.

Social media has changed all that. As we put the brakes on coverage, family, friends and peers reveal details through posts. The stories are out there, shared and read by many. It is no longer a secret but the media is lagging behind, still treating suicide the same way it has for centuries.

That prompts the question: should our role change? After all, we operate under the belief that a community can't solve a problem without identifying it, exploring it, and implementing solutions. Think about how the media has tackled spousal abuse and drunk driving. Raising awareness and educating readers has led to change on these kinds of social issues.

We think it may be time for us to assist in raising awareness about youth suicide.

So we turned to the experts to tailor this project, asking those working in fields that encounter suicide to give us direction.

With this project, we hope to show families across the province you are not alone, and that there is hope. We put real faces to a real tragedy that plays out across Ontario every day.

In the series, which runs online today through Saturday at www.theifp.ca, we show readers that suicide can touch any family. We focused on youth, but suicide is a community problem facing all ages. And although the pain of someone who takes their own life ends with that act, the pain for those left behind just begins.

In their deaths, the youth we profile here can make a difference, pointing out to each and every reader that it's up to all of us to identify those in need and come to the rescue.

• See page 15 for a lead-in to the series

WEB POLL RESULTS

(Go to www.theifp.ca)

The Province intends to toughen its anti-smoking laws by banning smoking in restaurant/bar patios, playgrounds and sports fields.

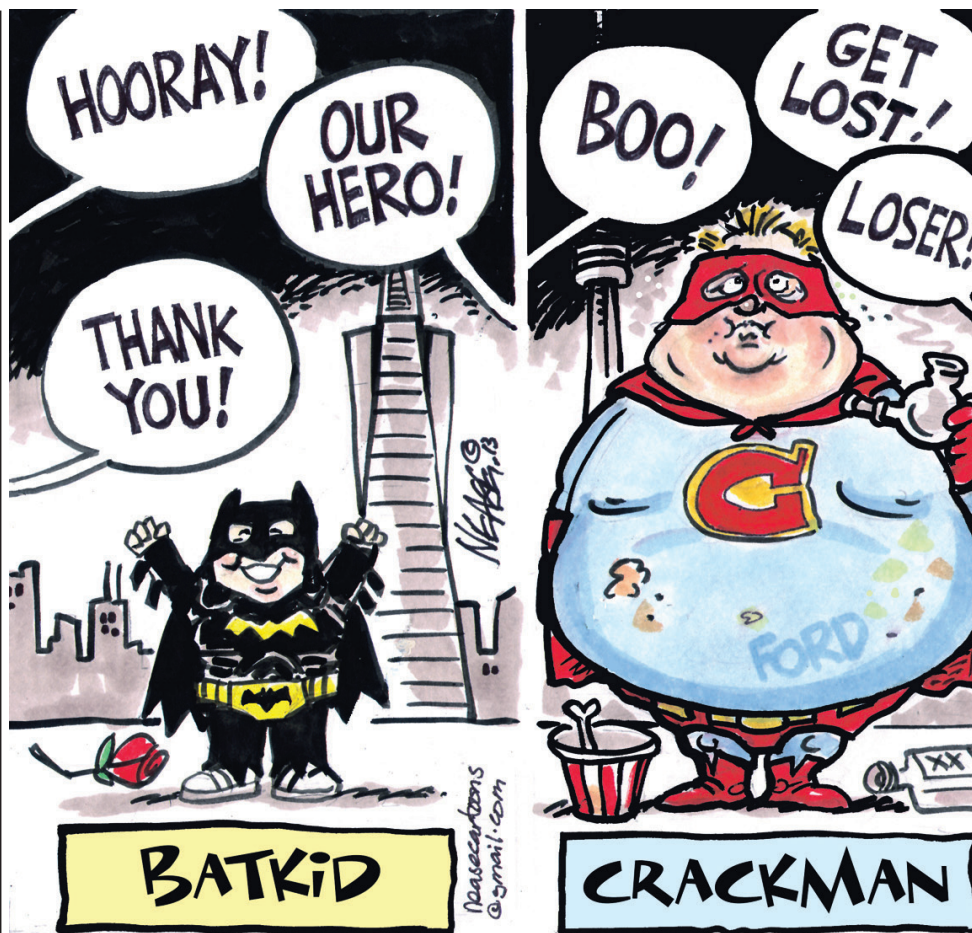
Do you support such a move?

- Yes (63%)
- No (37%)

The Independent & Free Press

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Letters to the editor

Distracted driving police 'propaganda'

Dear editor,
Vehicle collisions decline but "distracted" driving propaganda increases.

Sgt. Paul Davies reports in the Nov. 14 *Independent & Free Press* seeing many drivers using cell phones on his drive home without incident. Careless driving is a long-existing charge for those who inappropriately divert their attention from driving for any reason, including phones and watching flocks of birds.

Junk science claiming that phones are worse than drunk driving and unscientific anecdotes are simply not supported by steadily decreasing collision statistics since before cell phones in the 1970's. Forcing drivers to hide their device obviously increases risk. Suggesting it is risky using a device while stopped at a traffic signal is ridiculous.

This hypocritical law which

decries a specific motoring activity as dangerous, but declares it safe if the dialled digits are 911, is self-serving, revenue generating and political point-scoring—plain and simple.

Jason Fournier, Acton

Couple thanked for aiding youth

Dear editor,
In quoting the paper's Oct. 17 editorial—*Make a difference*—it said "it takes a community to keep children and youth safe".

It applied to my son on Thanksgiving Monday. He and his friend rode their bikes to Joseph Gibbons Park to play for an hour. When they left, my son's bike chain broke and he was unable to ride. His friend had already raced home and my son was left without any idea how to get home.

A couple, who were playing tennis at the court, came to his rescue when they heard his cries and offered to help. The woman walked him home while her partner took

his bike in the car (a black VW) and followed.

My son called me from the house as he was nervous and wanted the lady to explain what happened. I was so grateful at the time they had taken to do this, I forgot to get their names.

Thank you so much for your kind act. What you may not have realized is that my son is 10 years old and has developmental delays that impact decision-making. He would not have known what to do without someone with him.

It is because we live in Georgetown, I allow him more freedom to play with his friends, knowing others are also looking out for them in a safe environment.

Patricia McNeil, Georgetown

Letters policy

Letters must include the author's name, address and daytime phone number. Anonymous letters will not be published. Letters should not exceed 150 words and may be edited for content and/or length. Publication is not guaranteed.

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