

Searching for solutions to gun violence

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STAFF PHOTO/MIKE BARRETT

TRIGGERING FEAR

NEXT: YORK REGIONAL POLICE AND SENATOR DON MEREDITH OFFER PERSPECTIVES IN THE CONCLUSION TO OUR TWO-PART SERIES ON GUN CRIME.

major failure in dealing with gun violence lies not with police, but with the justice system, which she believes often proverbially slaps criminals on the wrist before releasing them back into the community.

Stiffer enforcement of gun laws is needed to crack down on people found with weapons, she said.

"The government needs to be proactive," she urged. "Don't wait until someone gets murdered to enforce the laws."

Her son came from a loving family, several members of which are high-achieving members of Canadian society, she noted.

STOUFFVILLE MAN CHARGED

Among the accomplishments of Mr. Chambers' family members, his brother, Shamawd, plays professional football for the CFL's Edmonton Eskimos.

Another relative rose through the ranks of Toronto Police to serve as a deputy chief.

Police investigating her son's death did a good job, Ms Logan-Chambers said, but she lamented the arduous criminal trial process of the men connected to the incident.

"It was hard on my family," she said, noting she and her son's father have both suffered health and financial complications since

their son's death.

Ms Logan-Chambers, affiliated with United Mothers Opposing Violence Everywhere, urged parents to take drastic steps to intervene if they discover a child is involved in criminal activity.

"They need to take control," she said, adding that includes cooperating with police. "Step up, be parents and be proactive in your kid's life."

Meanwhile, the midnight movie theatre slaughter in Aurora, Colorado, increasingly impacts everyone in our social media-driven global village, Social Services Network executive director Dr. Naila Butt said. So, too, did the racially motivated mass killing of 69 youth camp members last summer on Norway's Utoya Island.

Closer to home, the shootings in Scarborough and gang-style murder in Little Italy beg an end to rhetoric and a call to action, she said.

"If it happens in Toronto, can it happen in Markham?" Dr. Butt asked, before offering an emphatic, "Yes."

The medical doctor-turned-public health and social services advocate is also an active proponent of stemming family violence.

She leads a five-year, touring anti-violence symposium with community partners, including York Regional Police, the Children's Aid Society and peer agencies.

Her Markham-based network, focusing on the South Asian community, is inclusive and growing.

It's a management model based on her belief that integration, education and information empower individuals and neighbourhoods, leading to understanding, acceptance and peace.

Social Services Network executive director Dr. Naila Butt says establishing trust between isolated communities, police and social services agencies can help curb gun violence.

ON THE WEB

► Hear the radio edit of P. Reign's tribute to Shyanne Charles and Joshua Yasay, entitled Angels, at bit.ly/N8CsPX

The culture of violence needs to be addressed from a holistic perspective, she said.

"We need to look at why it's happening, examine the causes such as poverty, unemployment and youths' mistrust of authority and police."

Establishing communication, mutual trust and respect in communities that remain isolated is the key, she contended.

"Veiled racism" exists in our society, she bluntly stated.

It's mostly silent, but people feel it and its pain.

Closed societies have an "us against them" attitude, Dr. Butt said, adding breaking down barriers and bridging gaps will slowly dissolve the rancor that spawns violence.

ANYTHING THAT DIVIDES

She knows of what she speaks, candidly admitting she left a comfortable existence in her native Pakistan because of violence.

"They were fighting amongst each other and for what?" she said. "Anything that divides people, the colour of their skin, their faith, religion, is not good. Quality of life, that's what is important."

In many at-risk neighbourhoods, gangs wield more power than police, she said. Residents have distrust for police. Breaking the silence will stop the violence.

MASS SHOOTINGS

A timeline of some of the worst incidents of gun violence in Canada.

► Dec. 6, 1989

In the worst mass shooting in Canadian history, 14 women are killed and 12 people are wounded in a murderous rampage by Marc Lepine at École Polytechnique in Montreal.

► Dec. 26, 2005

Jane Creba, 15, is killed and six others are wounded in a gang-related shootout just north of the Eaton Centre in Toronto.

► Sept. 13, 2006

A lone gunman enters Dawson College in downtown Montreal and begins a shooting rampage that kills one person and wounds 19 others.

► June 2, 2012

One man is killed and six other people are wounded by gunfire, two critically, in a shooting at the Eaton Centre. One of the critically injured victims later dies.

► July 16, 2012

Two people are killed and 23 wounded when gunfire erupts at a block party in Scarborough.

but trust takes time.

The move to safer communities begins with individual and political will, she said.

More youth programs, schools and agencies working collaboratively with parents is part of the solution, she said.

"People in our diverse communities need to recognize there are supports and help is available," Dr. Butt said. "We need an integrated approach, where there are different tasks, but one goal. We need places where people are valued."

Stakeholders must realize immigration for newcomers is not as quick as settlement, she said.

"Talk ends when a commitment for allocated funds is shown and people are assigned specific tasks," Dr. Butt said. "Talk ends when a budget is in place and action is taken."



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