



**Jessica Ripley of the Ottawa Police Service talks about signs of individuals at risk of gang involvement at Thursday's symposium seeking solutions to rising gang activity and gun violence in Ottawa.**

**Photograph by: Jean Levac , Ottawa Citizen**

OTTAWA — To crack down on gun violence in Ottawa, stakeholders and community members brainstormed during a symposium Thursday 28 possible solutions to the city's increasing gang activity.

The Ottawa Police Service, Crime Prevention Ottawa, the Youth Services Bureau and Ottawa Community Housing hosted the symposium in response to a more than 30-per-cent spike in shootings this year.

The day of discussions that brought 150 people together centred on five key issues: to identify youth at risk of joining a gang, intervention, building a relationship between the community and police, prevention, and exit strategies.

"When a gang member wants to come out, the light will only come on once," Ottawa police Chief Charles Bordeleau said. "Somebody needs to be there to be able to help that person out and provide them the right supports."

As it stands now, an exit strategy for gang members simply does not exist in Ottawa.

To address that, participants brainstormed during a breakout session how to help gang members get out.

One proposed recommendation would see services aimed to help gang members develop the skills needed to access meaningful opportunities and gainful employment.

A common theme in all areas of discussion was the need for social services to be streamlined to create a "one-stop shop" for information.

Many of the recommendations also called for a strengthened partnership and collaboration among community members, social services, law enforcement agencies and government.

On building a trusting relationship between the community and police, the symposium heard that programs to reach out to children at a young age are necessary.

It's also important for the public to understand the roles and responsibilities of police officers in establishing a trusting relationship.

From a policing perspective, the Direct Action Response Team (DART) was created in 2007 to help crack down on illegal gang activity by ensuring gang members abide by court-ordered conditions.

In response to a spike in gunplay in Ottawa this year, Bordeleau assigned three more constables to the team, bringing its strength to nine. Two more detectives were added to the guns and gangs section.

A final report on the public forum and leadership symposium and an action plan are expected to be available by the end of November.

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