

Ottawa South EMC

Work together to eliminate gangs: forum

Posted Oct 25, 2012 By [Laura Mueller](#)

EMC news - Ottawa already knows what it needs to do to reduce gang activity in the city - now, it just needs to make it happen.

That was the theme of a discussion at city hall last Wednesday evening during a forum called "Taking Action Together: Addressing Gangs in Our City."

The Oct. 17 event was organized by the Ottawa police, Crime Prevention Ottawa, the Youth Services Bureau and Ottawa Community Housing, but most of the discussion and questions from members of the public rehashed issues that have been discussed at similar events in the past.

"I think these are themes that we've heard through our conversations," said Ottawa police Chief Charles Bordeleau.

He added it is still important to listen to those stories and create a dialog about the issues that people are seeing in their communities.

The chief said he was pleased with the number of people who attended and the amount of passion they showed about the issue.

A sharp rise in shootings this year reinvigorated the push to end gang violence in Ottawa. There have already been 31 shootings this year as of Oct. 3, more than a 30 per cent increase over last year, said Staff Sgt. Mark Patterson from the police guns and gangs unit.

There are an estimated 473 people involved in gangs in Ottawa and between 25 and 30 of them are believed to be involved in shootings.

The event began with a panel presentation from Bordeleau, Patterson, Crime Prevention Ottawa executive director Nancy Worsfold and a special guest speaker, Jabari Lindsay, a youth development manager for the City of Toronto.

"This is not a problem we can arrest our way out of," Bordeleau said, emphasizing that solutions must be collaborative and focused on preventing youth from becoming involved with gangs.

"We don't have to reinvent the wheel. All we have to do is look beyond our borders and see what we can adapt to use in our community," Bordeleau said.

"A multifaceted solution that involves the whole community is the answer."

Lindsay shared one tip that resonated with the panel and audience: we can't forget to "help the helpers."

Healing communities is about taking care of the people who are addressing these issues in the community, too, he said.

Afterwards, around 200 people in attendance had a chance to share their thoughts, stories and questions with the panel.

One resident, Frank Reid, thanked organizers for putting together the forum because too often, these types of discussions happen at the national level.

"This is where it impacts the community the most, locally," Reid said.

Mohamed Sofa, a community activist from Pinecrest-Queensway who now lives in Beacon Hill-Cyrville, said forums alone are not going to make a difference.

"We have more policing, more public forums and no more programs," Sofa said. "That's not a recipe for success."

He said Ottawa is very bureaucratic and has historically not been willing to take a risk and provide grants to fund grassroots community projects.

"How can we take this discussion to the neighbourhoods and provide funding that will change lives?" said Sofa.

In Toronto, Lindsay said the city has been willing to give out "really risky grants" to small, community-led groups, to "honour people who have ideas." When money goes to frontline workers and people directly in the

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Laura Mueller, Metroland
Ottawa police Chief Charles Bordeleau, Jabari Lindsay, youth development manager for the City of Toronto, and Ottawa police Guns and Gangs Unit Staff Sgt. Mark Patterson address a crowd of approximately 200 people at city hall on Oct. 17 to discuss gangs in the city.

community, there is more chance of success, he said.

The most poignant moment of the evening came when a woman gave an emotional plea for the city to acknowledge and assist the "invisible victims": mothers of the young people involved in gang activity.

"Those men, respect their mothers. You need to talk to them," she said.

Lindsay agreed, saying he always had utmost respect for his own mother during his wayward youth and that has led him to ensure he connects with mothers of the youth he works with in Toronto.

Reaching out to people directly affected and involved with gang activity was also on the mind of Sandy Hill resident Christien Levien.

He called on the police to reach out directly to youth involved in gangs in order to create an effective solution.

"We won't hear their voices, because they're not here," Levien said. "They will be further marginalized."

Creating a "collaborative solution," as the city says it wants to do, involves collaborating with people directly involved with the problem - not just city departments and agencies, Levien said.

"We're open to that," Bordeleau said, adding that it is extremely difficult to engage current gang members in those kinds of discussions.

In an interview after the forum, Bordeleau said the police service has connected with former gang members in the past and found it very helpful, but he stressed that he would greatly appreciate anyone who could direct him to a gang-involved young person who is willing to speak to the police.

Planning for the forum began in July, after Premier Dalton McGuinty announced \$12.5 million for violence-prevention programs, including \$7.5 million for the Provincial Anti-Violence Intervention Strategy that funds the Ottawa police's DART (Direct Action Response Team) unit, which deals with gun and gang crime.

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