

EM0130: The Globe and Mail, September 5, 2001, page A14

Improving lives of black youth will stop violence, group says

BY GAY ABBATE

Improving the lives of black young people would stop the shootings and killings that have developed into a serious problem, a black community group says.

More than 100 black young people, most of them male, have been killed in the past five years, 20 in this year alone, according to the Building Hope Coalition. Most were black-on-black killings and involved firearms.

A flyer announcing a series of community meetings on violence, to be held by the Coalition, shows a handgun with an large X placed over it.

"Break the silence. Violence affects all of us," it states. It also lists the names of those killed since 1996.

Toronto Councillor Maria Augimeri, the group's only white member, said the city has

a crisis on its hands, but the other levels of government are doing nothing to help.

"The municipality is the last resort. If we say no, then there's no one left," she said.

Ms. Augimeri said the action plan will include recommendations for the three levels of government, steps to improve conditions in the Jane and Finch area, which she represents and where she spent her childhood, and how to deal with social-housing issues.

Gun control is only part of the answer, she said. "We can end youth violence through education, giving young people life skills and employment training, and giving them hope for a future."

Other coalition members include Lennox Farrell – a well-known teacher, parent and community volunteer in the Jane-Finch neighbourhood – and Dudley Laws of the

Black Action Defence Committee.

Today, members of Toronto's Youth Cabinet will announce one stage of the Coalition's strategy, which includes a plea to the city to set aside money for programs for youth that will draw them away from the situations that trigger violence.

More than 80 per cent of incidents involving young people and violence occur on weekdays, with lunch time and after school as the peak hours, a study of the city's youth shows.

The group plans to ask all three levels of government to make a contribution through job creation, an expanded hate hot line and other measures.

With 45 per cent of the city's black community living below the poverty line, employment is a top priority, Ms. Augimeri said.