

Brainstorming forum focuses on impact of violence on community and its children

By Angela Simmons

In 1995, approximately 20 years ago, nine-year-old Marcus DeBack was shot and killed while playing on a playground at North 55th and West Wright streets.

No, Marcus was not the target that day, but he was a victim. Marcus' death and the loss of other young lives as a result of gun violence continues to affect family members and Milwaukee communities alike.

More recently, 10-year-old Sierra Guyton was struck by a stray bullet while playing on the playground of Clarke Street Elementary School in May of 2014. Sierra later died.

Gun Violence, Urban Neighborhoods, Protecting Families and "Precious Lives" was the title of The Community Brainstorming Conference Breakfast Forum held on March 28th at St. Matthew C.M.E. Church located at 2944 N. 9th St.

Leading the discussion were panelist Bently Turner, Chair of District 3 Citywide Block Watch Council, 15th District Alderman Russell Stamper II, Executive Director of the Southside Organizing Committee Tammy Rivera, 371 Productions' Community Engagement Director Paul Kjelland, and Precious Lives producers Emily Forman and Eric Von.

Forman described Precious Lives as a two-year radio series about youth and gun violence in the city of Milwaukee.

She trusts that the radio series' perspective will resonate with those who listen, as no one is immune to the nation-wide issue of gun violence.

"I really believe in the power of story telling to connect people to care about a certain topic ... When you hear someone's personal story related to gun violence and you get to know them, you see the topic in a different way that's maybe not portrayed nor-

mally as it's portrayed on the media," said Forman.

According to Precious Lives' web site, the 100 episode series seeks to raise and maintain public attention toward the issue of gun violence in Milwaukee and nationally, stating that studies show even after a national tragedy, public awareness declines after two weeks.

"I think the larger intent of Precious Lives is to keep this from being a one news cycle event," said Precious Live producer Eric Von.

"We as a community understand the long-term impact of even one child being killed ... the ripple effect that that killing has on people connected ... and those less connected, neighbors, people who live blocks away and wherever else they may be living in the city."

Von goes on to state that he is aware Precious Lives will not solely end gun violence, but hopes the production raises awareness and helps community members recognize the dire need for their role in curbing gun violence.

Precious Lives addresses the issue of gun violence with youth as a public health problem, focusing on homicides and suicides within Milwaukee and suburban neighborhoods. Community Engagement Director Paul Kjelland stated, "If you look at violence, most violence occurs after violence has been experienced ... so we're looking at violence in the same way you would a communicable disease, the same way you would the flu.

"The biggest factor that leads to you getting the flu is being in contact with the flu."

The series shows multiple perspectives, the victim and the shooter, exploring the weapon and its path and uncovering the environmental influences contributing to each child's death.

"Where are they [weapons] coming from and what sorts of factors in the environment, whether it be things like economics, that affect a neighborhood or a region ... and what are those points in which you can intervene and break connections," said Kjelland who works closely with partners like the Medical College of Wisconsin and others to promote effective strategies to eradicate gun violence.

Seventeenth District State Representative LaTonya Johnson spoke briefly on findings from a study conducted in June 2012 on the economic impact of gun violence in inner cities, Milwaukee being 1 of 8 cities studied.

"A 10 percent reduction of violent crime would cause the entire Milwaukee area property values to go up \$800 million dollars. So, gun violence in the city of Milwaukee has an economic impact as well.

"It has an economic impact in terms of the employers that we're able to attract to the inner city of Milwaukee, it has an impact on the number of houses we're able to sell in the city of Milwaukee," said Johnson.

Representative Johnson also referenced a 2014 Kelly Report based on Chicago that reported for every one homicide, cities lose approximately 70 residents to relocation.

Spanning from 17th and Walnut to 20th Streets and up to North Avenue, the Johnson's Park Neighborhood Association goes to great lengths to promote public safety.

Chair of District Three Citywide

Volunteers needed for Center Street business district

(continued from page 2)

phy, whose 10th Aldermanic District also includes a portion of BID 39, said community volunteers and assistance can "make a significant difference" in giving BID 39 strong ties to the community.

"The BID 39 board is new and is poised to do some outstanding work along Center Street, and I ask citizens to strongly consider being a part of this dynamic atmosphere by volunteering their time and talents," he said.

Alderman Willie C. Wade, whose 7th Aldermanic District includes a portion of BID 39, energetically echoed the sentiments of his colleagues: "The health of any commercial area is determined by the support and relationships it has with the surrounding neighborhoods and people.

Please come out to the community kick-off event on Saturday and see what opportunities exist, and also see what positive difference you can make."

Block Watch Council and Johnson's Park Neighborhood Association member Bently Turner moved into

the neighborhood in 2003 along with about 75 to 80 other new homeowners. "We met with the current resi-

dents ... and developed a neighborhood association ... We encourage (continued on page 8)



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