



The Star Press

Concerned citizens talk solutions to teen gun problem

Star Press - Muncie, Ind.
Author: Walker, Andrew
Date: Feb 5, 2011
Start Page: n/a
Section: NEWS
Text Word Count: 787

MUNCIE -- Tick, tock. Tick, tock.

That ticking sound some say they hear near the city's south side is a time bomb ready to explode as winter slowly transitions into spring.

Snow and ice still cover the ground, yet neighborhood residents say they've already seen a disturbing trend: kids with guns, ready to do battle, roaming city streets, the same streets that youth activist Carl Malone isn't yet ready to concede.

"I don't see the kids taking over the community, taking over the streets and making it a violent neighborhood," Malone said. "I don't see that taking place."

Malone intends to keep that from happening, even if he and other community activists like him have to go door to door, asking parents and teenagers to stop this deadly disease before it takes root.

The fears of those who don't feel comfortable walking down the street to the convenience store or to nearby homes reached a breaking point last week, when Malone arranged an impromptu meeting, inviting parents, teenagers, neighborhood leaders and even members of the county's criminal justice organizations to share their fears, hopes and solutions.

Forty or so people packed the basement of the Trinity African Methodist Episcopal Church at Fifth and Hackley streets, bickering at times about suggested long-term solutions or funding for programs. The group, however, did come to a consensus about two items of note: The problems start at home, and they must be stopped before winter turns to spring.

"It's ridiculous because you've got all this black-on-black crime, and none of the parents want to sit down and talk about it," concerned mother Gail Coats told the group. "All the parents want to do is they want to get out there, hoopin' and hollerin' and acting a fool with these kids, and then they make like, 'Well, my child didn't do anything.'"

Concerned father Vincent Wolfe told the crowd that the recent gun problem started, innocently enough, with the teens performing rap music.

"I even told my son that it's going to blow up, (that) it's going to get out of hand," Wolfe said. "As soon as they started pulling guns, I knew right then and there that he needed to back out of it."

From there, two or three groups of teens banded together and have formed apparent rivalries, participating in such gang-like activities as organized beatings, drug deals and even firing weapons at each other.

Lt. Al Williams, supervisor of the Muncie Drug Unit, deals with gun-toting juveniles first-hand. He said last week that the kids in these groups have the wrong mentality.

"I ask them, 'Why do you need a gun?' and they tell me, 'The other guys are shooting at me,'" Williams said. "I say, 'Why are they shooting at you?' 'Cause they don't like our gang.'"

Another primary concern for most in attendance at last week's meeting was the representation -- and apparent misrepresentation -- of various groups, families and teens who feel singled out by a list circulating through the community.

The list, according to deputy prosecutor Carman Malone, was primarily created by one Muncie mother who named 20 to 25 people -- some teenagers, some young adults -- who she alleges are promoting violence and carrying guns.

That mother, who was not in attendance at last week's meeting, was identified by name by several parents who claimed she singled out teens in one group and blatantly left out several boys in another dangerous group to which her own sons and nephews belong.

Malone said in order for the prosecutor's office to get involved in any fashion, people need to step forward and cooperate fully throughout the entire process.

"There's some cases that they will have to be dismissed if the victims do not stick with it," she said. "We can't move forward without someone willing to talk."

Malone and Chief Deputy Prosecutor Judi Calhoun at times vented their frustration with the parents and teenagers at the meeting who were willing to express their concerns, but not to provide names of those involved.

"If we have kids that are doing what we've been told they're doing, they need to be in the system," Calhoun said. "We need to make sure that this violence is going to end."

Carl Malone hopes to arrange more meetings to gather those teens and their families. He's already set one for 6 p.m. Thursday, at Trinity African Methodist Episcopal Church again.

Malone and others know the time bomb is ticking.

"If they know that we're out there and that we're coming, it would do a lot better than just waiting until the next shooting," concerned father Lamont Keiths said. "And then another candlelight vigil."

Contact reporter Andrew Walker at 213-5845.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction or distribution is prohibited without permission.