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Adv. Interviewing Techniques
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Q&A: The story behind Sureya Ibrahim, founder of Mothers of Regent Park; helping mothers heal from losing their sons to gun violence

Members of youth gun violence in Toronto ages to people 20 years old, and this is how Sureya Ibrahim helps her community to heal



Photo was taken from Ryerson University

At a news conference, Deputy Police Chief Myron Demkiw revealed that the average age of those who participated in gun violence in Toronto between 2015 and 2020 was 25 years old. However, as of 2021, the age of victims and accused of gun violence has gone down to under 20 years old. We must remember the victims and help reprimand the accused. Still, we also need to pay attention to those personally affected after the tragedy of losing their children due to the youth gun violence in Toronto.

Sureya Ibrahim is doing her part for her community to help heal mothers who have suffered loss from cases of gun violence among youth in her area. This is her story and stance on the concerning issue.

What can you tell me about Mothers of Peace in Regent Park?

It started in about 2015 to support the moms who lost their son from gun violence and heal the whole community that trauma has ripple effects.

What type of services do Mothers of Peace offer to members?

We've been building capacity in trauma, bringing guest speakers who specialize in different things, delivering workshops. If you go to the mother space, it will give you especially since COVID is virtually stuff, and we've been posting them there, and we had it also nicely live Facebook live as well. The sessions are those workshops, and they are on YouTube as well. We've been doing events outdoor as well. We've been doing healing trips for the parents, taking them outside of the community—a healing session with the therapist. Right now, it's happening specifically for the moms who lost their sons in the past two or three years. We've been providing the healing with a registered therapist and for the whole community as well.

What was the “push” to start this program in your community?

I was attending the crisis network meeting, which is, uh, staff from agencies and the city of Toronto, and they respond to the shooting, stabbing or anything related to that. So I was attending those meetings for a long time which I found at that meeting. Is it just a kind of reaction table? Someone was killed, and they got together, and the police came reports there was a stabbing the shooting and the someone, a young person died. I was sick and tired of this reaction because after the agency leaves the community at the end of the day, I want whatever's necessary for the people, the Community and the family who lose their loved ones from gun violence.

Have you ever lost someone due to youth gun violence in Toronto?

You don't need to lose someone in order to help your fellow communities and help them out of your way from losing a child. I am a parent of three teenagers who are like over 18, and it's not easy. It takes all of us to raise a child, but when it comes to gun violence. No, I don't need to lose anybody in order to care.

Why do you think the statistics have had this drastic change in recent years?

When we started Mothers of Peace for the youth who were dying was over 20, it was devastating that time. But now it's getting worse and worse, and society doesn't care because they are black. And because they're coming from the immigrant community and it's just very unfortunate and very sad what is happening around us. We have enough resources to stop this and help, and this is what's happening, and the trauma has ripple effects in the community.

What does the “ripple effect” look like after losing a young community member this way?

When you lose a child, it's like everybody knows that child in the community they see that child is growing[up] they're all connected to the other kids. Those kids used to go to the same school as my kids. And when you lose that, it just tears apart the whole community, and you don't know who is next also? And then the people, the parents who are losing the child and the amount of grief they are going through. It's despicable. It breaks families.

Why do you think these victims and accused are only getting younger?

Programs are not accessible for them, and the pandemic makes it worse. So it takes the whole society to support the community.

What kind of resources do you think should be in place to prevent this?

There has to be a wrap-around program that has to be done after school, volunteer opportunities, job opportunities for those young kids so that they won't be recouped on the street on every corner. These kids' parents work at precarious jobs, and those kids are being recruited for bad habits. There has to be coaching and monitoring for those young people.

Guns seem to be easily accessible nowadays. Should the city be scared of that?

A 100 per cent under percent at the end of the day look at the jail systems because society doesn't care. And who is in the jail system? Black Muslim, and Indigenous [people]. Look at the school systems. If something is happening, we just open another school and then label them instead of dealing with the root cause.