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TOPICAL

Madison community leaders introduce 15 specific recommendations to prevent, reduce violence

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PHOTO BY MICHELLE STOCKER

Michael Johnson, CEO of the Boys and Girls Club of Dane County, speaks about recommendations to reduce violence in the press conference at the Boys and Girls Club of Dane County in Madison.

A crowd of bystanders — many of them young students — watched a demonstration of two conflict resolution scenarios, one of which ended in a staged fatal shooting outside of the Boys & Girls Club in Fitchburg Monday.

Complete with a police car and hearse, the scenarios depicted how interactions can be resolved peacefully or how quickly they can turn to violence, something that has been seen in the extreme in Madison recently with a string of three connected homicides.

Michael Johnson, CEO of the Boys & Girls Club of Dane County, said the demonstration was meant to show alternatives to violence and a positive example of conflict resolution, but the vivid scene proved difficult for 12-year-olds Namani Alves, Aajiyah Vance and Alyssa Burton to watch.

They said that the scene of conflict resolution portrayed just does not happen in their experience, noting that people are not going to stop being in gangs.

“I feel like the second act (positive conflict resolution) is how they want things to happen, but it isn’t,” Alves said.

The skit followed an announcement by state, city and community leaders of 15 specific recommendations to reduce violence in Madison. Johnson said comprehensive reforms in Madison have been slow to follow studies of systemic issues that can lead to violence like education disparities, unemployment and mass incarceration.

“We’ve studied these issues to death,” Johnson said. “It’s time to act.”

Several of the solutions targets ways to engage formerly incarcerated young men and former gang members in programs that teach trade skills and offer anger management and communication classes.

Others focus on school-based programs to find alternative disciplinary methods to reduce suspension. Another calls for investment in substance abuse treatment.

Rep. Melissa Sargent, D-Madison, spoke in support of a recommendation that would implement a citywide gun buyback program. This program would work in partnership with faith communities and offer \$250 for any working handgun and \$500 for any working semiautomatic weapons turned into authorities.

“Too many of our children are dying,” Sargent said. “Enough is enough.”

Ald. Shiva Bidar-Sielaff, District 5, spoke to convey the support of the City Council. Aids. Maurice Cheeks, District 10, and Matt Phair, District 20, will be releasing their own recommendations to reduce violence at a press conference Tuesday.

“We really are working together and standing together in moving these recommendations forward,” Bidar-Sielaff said.

Anthony Cooper, Sr., director of reentry services at Nehemiah, Caliph Muab’El, local Pastor Colier McNair, Fitchburg Mayor Steve Arnold, Madison Metropolitan School Board member Anna Moffit and University of Wisconsin-Madison sophomore Tyriek Mack also introduced recommendations.

Mack said the spectrum of local leaders present was promising. Comparing his hometown of Washington, D.C. to Madison, he said the community feels more proactive.

To curb violence, Mack said a range of issues like access to education and healthy food need to be addressed.

“I think that what we have to do has a society is start looking at these issues and not isolate them,” Mack said. “There’s a deep connection between how institutions work together and historically, (they) have marginalized and oppressed people, specifically black people and people of color.”

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Photos: Community leaders address violence in Madison at Boys and Girls Club
May 17, 2016

15 Recommendations

1. Meet with leaders associated with recent incidents and offer gainful employment and training opportunities to help them become productive adults in return for ceasefire.
2. Implement a citywide Madison Alternative Policing Strategy
3. Offer a \$10k reward for any homicide that is reported and leads to the arrest and conviction of any offender(s).
4. Organize a citywide gun back program twice a year in partnership with communities of faith

5. Create a targeted intervention program for young men between the ages of 18 and 40 who are former gang members or non-violent offenders and help them find life and career coaches to minimize them from committing another crime in Madison.
6. Hire former gang members as outreach workers who have street credibility but also have demonstrated that they have become productive adults to be a bridge between law enforcement officials and individuals who are considering a life of criminal activity.
7. Offer immediate assistance, protection and support to any person and their family who is willing to cooperate with police to help bring intelligence that can solve crime(s) in our community. A fund could be created to help cover this cost to assist law enforcement officials.
8. Ensure high quality, culturally competent mental health services that are widely accessible
9. Support a comprehensive violence prevention plan that include prevention, intervention, enforcement, rehabilitation and reentry programs
10. Fund grassroots, community outreach workers to work with neighborhood associations and community centers in targeted communities. The plan should also call for all community centers to stay open until 10 p.m. during the week, midnight on Saturdays with some programming on Sunday for at risk teens and young adults.
11. Offer universal school-based programs to reduce or prevent violent behavior in a given school and develop supportive strategies to reduce school suspensions across the board
12. Lobby for policies that address social determinants of violence such as unemployment, income inequality, rapid social change and education access
13. Implement a countywide reentry court program that allows young nonviolent offenders to learn trade skills and provides classes on anger management and communication
14. Treatment for substance abuse
15. Teach young children and families effective conflict resolution skills early.

Abigail Becker

Abigail Becker joined The Capital Times in 2016, where she primarily covers city and county government. She previously worked for the Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism and the Wisconsin State Journal.



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