

## TWO YEARS AFTER DANZIG

TWO YEARS AFTER TORONTONIANS WERE SHAKEN BY THE TRAGIC SHOOTINGS ON SCARBOROUGH'S DANZIG STREET, the death of TDSB teacher and community activist Abshir Hassan reminds us all that gun violence is an on-going reality in our city. Abshir became an unintended victim in a hail of bullets that rained down outside a housing complex where children play in Lawrence Heights.

As we pause to reflect on the two-year anniversary on one of Toronto's worst shootings, we must celebrate the progress we've made, but also ask ourselves why more hasn't been done to keep Torontonians safe. Despite the flurry of announcements from every level of government in 2012, we still see an increase in racialization of poverty in Toronto. Two years later, young people growing up in many Toronto neighbourhoods still don't see a hopeful future for themselves. They continue to watch their parents work two or three jobs to make ends meet, and older siblings graduating with huge debts and few career offers. And despite the improvements in community policing, far too often they still experience harassment and racial profiling. So we must ask ourselves – why?

Since 2009, the Canadian economy has shed 47,100 permanent jobs for youth aged 15 to 24. Young people who have had the slightest brush with the law find that even temp agencies are refusing them work. For too many of them the drug trade offers a more likely income than getting a good job. Desperation and hopelessness are dangerous motivators for violent behaviour.

What will it take to reverse this situation? We need a more honest approach of systemic change to lower dropout rates, fight poverty by creating good jobs and delivering strong social services and respect. The desire for respect starts early in life, and nobody can put a price on the feeling welcome in a classroom. Even basic items like recreational programming can end youth isolation, while teaching important life skills and providing jobs to young people. Full participation in the democratic process and electing politicians who are committed and accountable to these communities is crucial.

There is a role for every level of government, for civil society, and most of all for business. Over 80% of jobs are in the private sector, and many more of those need to become good jobs available to young people (and their parents) in racialized communities. When workers cleaning office towers, serving food, working retail or welcoming tourists have to hold two or three jobs to survive, something has to change.

Instead of spending millions subsidizing low-wage employers, the Ontario government can easily take steps to update labour laws so people can form unions and gain better wages and benefits. Workers in the service sector can have their jobs and wage levels protected when contracts change from one company to another. Government suppliers can be asked to provide stable full-time jobs instead of precarious work. Measures that open opportunities to apprenticeships or higher learning will pay back many times over.

It is all our responsibility to challenge discrimination, to work for equity, and to demand good jobs. Only then will the next generation feel they have a chance to build healthy, safe and respectful communities. As we mark the second anniversary of the Danzig shootings, it is important to build political will to address the problems at the source of gun violence.

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