

It's Time to Stop the Violence in our Community

By James H. Buford

Following the one-year anniversary of the Call to Oneness demonstrations, crime in the St. Louis area appears to be drifting back into its old habits. Although murder has decreased by 30 percent in the City of St. Louis, crimes such as armed robberies and aggravated assaults with guns are on the increase. Despite this, we should not become lax in our desire to continually reduce crime in our communities. Crime is an event which has been tolerated in our neighborhoods for far too long. Whether it is robbery or rape, drugs or murder, the time has come for our community to take a permanent stance against all criminal activity.

If we could be honest with ourselves, far too many young men and women choose crime as a means of financial support and recreation. Yes, the economy has been bad for some time but this is no excuse for the poor to become involved in illegal trades. Much attention has been given to the need for jobs and youth activities to curb crime. But there are also some remedies that can be done without the use of increased programs and funds. There is a need for residents of crime-ridden communities to use anonymous tip lines to call the police to report illegal activity. For too long fear and apathy have dictated how we handle crime in our community. 'No snitching' is a rule that does more damage to the innocent residents, victims and family members of crime victims than it does to the people who are out there committing crime. It is imperative that we take back our streets from the criminals. Recently, St. Louis Metropolitan Police Chief Daniel Isom visited the Urban League's Federation of Block Units Delegate Assembly. Among other things, he promised to partner with the Federation to build more block units in the city of St. Louis. The Federation is an organized neighborhood self-help organization that bands together to make their neighborhoods safer, more self-sufficient and better organized. In order for us to be committed to making our communities safer, we must change our attitudes towards crime prevention. Crime, should not just be the police officers' problem, the onus is upon us to take the initiative to make a difference in our own communities.

In addition, organized youth activities are also needed to curtail violent crime among youth and young adults. So far in 2009, approximately 12 teens aged 13 – 19 have been killed in St. Louis which is an 18 percent decrease of the number of teens murdered in 2008. Therefore, year-around youth workforce training, camps and other programs are needed to re-focus our teens' minds on planning for their futures and not for their deaths. Now is the time for a concerted effort to help reduce violent crimes among our youth. The Urban League currently operates programs in partnership with the Missouri Career Center and Jobs for Missouri Graduates to help teens get off the streets and into jobs and job training. Despite our programs, there is still a need for more.

Although we are seeing a decrease in murders in the St. Louis area, I still believe that it is important for our community leaders to stay in the fight to help get our troubled youths off of the streets. Rather than waiting to see what will happen this year, I believe that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. We need to develop a low-tolerance for crime in our community. It is up to community leaders, government officials, neighbors, church members, pastors, families and friends to join in the fight to stop the violence in our city. To date, the Urban League is forming a Crime-Free Initiative to help curtail violence in our society. If we are not part of the solution, then we are a part of the problem. The time is now to stop the violence in our community.